DECEMBER 2008
$4.99

LAUGHING MATTER

Jeff Foxworthy Challenges Smoltz:
"Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader?"

ChopTalk®

THE OFFICIAL MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF THE ATLANTA BRAVES

SPECIAL REPORT

Annual Prospects Survey Shows Farm's Recovered From The Teixeira Trade

Pete Van Wieren Reflects On Braves Hall of Fame Career And Reasons For Retirement

PROFESSOR EMERITUS

THE ROAD AHEAD

Jeff Francoeur Discusses Slump, Comeback Plans In Far-Ranging Q&A

EVERY GAME IS FULL OF GREAT MOMENTS

CATCH THEM ALL IN 2009

Secure your seats for the 2009 season as the Braves take on Interleague opponents, the Boston Red Sox and New York Yankees in addition to exciting NL matchups. Season tickets are on sale now for as low as $249 and include the option of 90 day, interest free financing through GE Financing.

Visit braves.com/tickets or call 404.577.9100 to purchase your 2009 tickets.

Braves

© 2008. Atlanta National League Baseball Club, Inc. All rights reserved. ™ The Braves script and tomahawk are trademarks of the Atlanta National League Baseball Club, Inc. All rights reserved.

BATTING ORDER

DECEMBER 2008

POWER HITTERS

6-9
PROFESSOR EMERITUS
After 33 Years In the Booth, Pete Van Wieren Signs Off To Embrace Retirement By Patty Rasmussen

18-20
LAUGHING MATTER
Foxworthy Challenges Smoltz: Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader? By Patty Rasmussen

22-24
THE ROAD AHEAD
Francoeur Discusses Slump, Comeback Plans In Far-Ranging Q&A Interview By Patty Rasmussen

SPECIAL REPORT: THE FUTURE

26-30
WELL-OILED MACHINE
Finding, Signing and Developing Talent the "Braves Way" Is a Sophisticated, Never-Ending, Worldwide Challenge By Jon Cooper

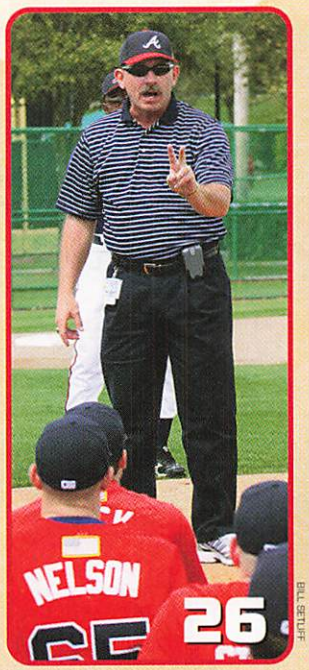
34-35
STATE OF THE FARM
Major Indicators Point To Impending Surge In Development of Talent By Bill Ballew

35-36
THE VERY BEST
Top Prospects Lists By Bill Ballew

40-42
A PROSPECT'S STORY
Cole Rohrbough's Talent and Makeup Are Unmistakable, Even In Bad Times By Bill Ballew

43
DESERT THUNDER
Flowers, Hanson Taking Arizona Fall League By Storm By Robert Martinez

46
BIG STICK
McCann Wins Second Silver Slugger As Best Hitting Catcher in NL By Mark Bowman of MLB.com



BILL SETLIFF

BILL SETLIFF

SCOTT MILLER

PAUL ABELL/ATLANTA BRAVES

46

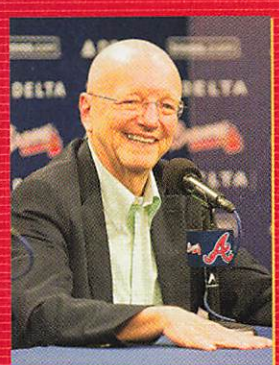
COVER CREDITS

PETE VAN WIEREN by Paul Abell/Atlanta Braves

Jeff Foxworthy: Clayton Cameracraft Photography

Jeff Francoeur: Paul Abel/Atlanta Braves

Design by Clark Odom



BATTING ORDER

DECEMBER 2008

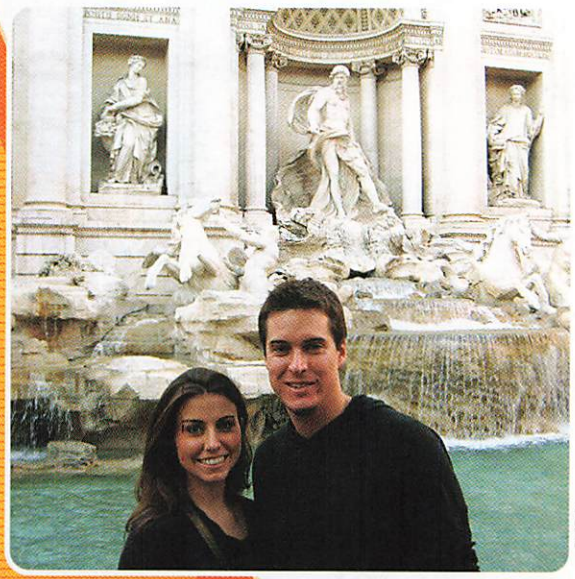
SINGLES HITTERS

12-13 SCOREBOARD
14-15 BUNTS & BASEHITS
16-17 OFF THE FIELD
44 BEHIND THE NUMBERS By Steve Fall
54-55 HEROES & HISTORY
Jody Davis Chalks Up First Championship As Manager In Cubs System By Brian Knapp
56 ALUMNI NOTES
58-59 BEYOND BASEBALL By Patty Rasmussen
60-61 TALKIN' CHOP
62 XTRA INNINGS

PITCHERS

11 PAINTING THE CORNERS By Jay Busbee
15 FRANK WREN
17 BOBBY COX
20 BATTER UP! By Casey Kotchman
42 AROUND BASEBALL By Ken Rosenthal of FoxSports.com
57 GARY CARUSO
61 JOHNNY SAJEM'S CARTOON

58



SPECIAL

PINCH-HITTERS

49-50 2009 SCHEDULE CALENDAR
51 TICKET/TURNER FIELD INFO
52 SPRING TRAINING INFO
53 STAT PARADE
55 HOW I MADE IT TO THE MAJORS By Steve Fall
56 BIRTHDAYS

PAUL ABELL/ATLANTA BRAVES

ON DECK

47 FARM SYSTEM ROUNDUP By Bill Ballew
48 FARM TEAM SCHEDULES

VOLUME 4, NUMBER 12

CHOPTALK USPS Periodicals Publication 022-732; ISSN 1555-1547 is published monthly for $37.95 per year ($56.95 Canada and Mexico; $76.95 other international; payment in U.S. dollars only) by Wonderdog Publishing, Inc.

Copyright 2008 with all rights reserved. Reproduction or use, without permission, of any content, in whole or part - in any manner - is prohibited.

Office of publication is located at 12829 Trinity Dr., Stafford, Tex. 77477-4214. Visit Braves.com/ChopTalk. E-mail Letters@ChopTalkonline.com. This is the Official Monthly Magazine of the Atlanta Braves. Single copy price is $4.99. Periodical postage paid at Stafford, Tex., and additional mailing offices.

POSTMASTER: Please send address changes and returns to: ChopTalk, P.O. Box 80750, Conyers, Ga. 30013-8750.

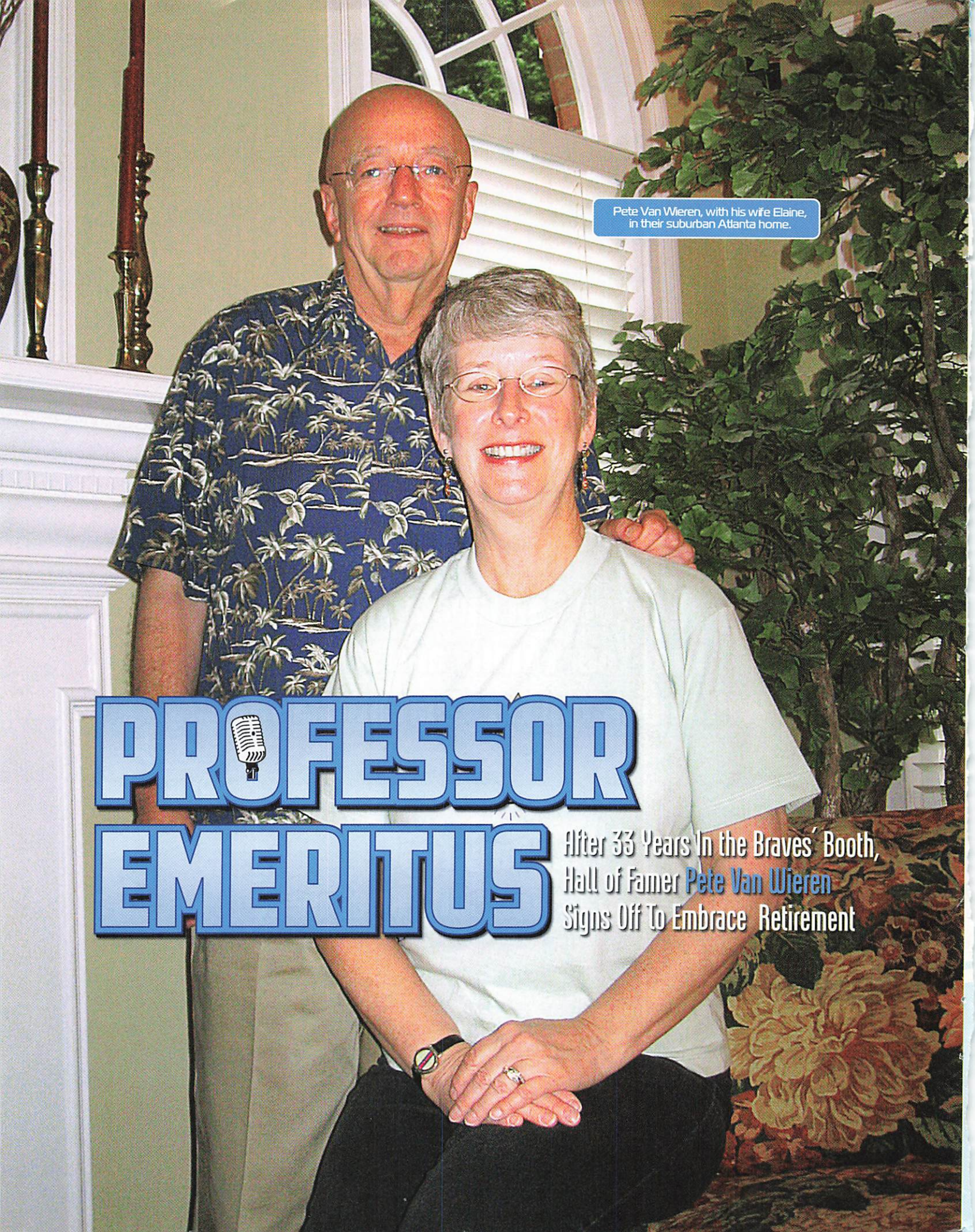
Times Are Tough,
But Everyone Still Needs
A Reasonably Priced Gift Option
For The Holidays.

For Just $37.95,
You Can Give a Gift
That Your Family and Friends
Will Thank You For 12 Months a Year...

Not Only That,
But You Or Your Gift Recipient
Will Get a FREE Braves Autograph, Too.

It's Our Usual Holiday Offer - But This Year, It Feels Better Than Ever.

See Pages 32-33 for More Details On Our Autograph Offer...
Or Just Call 1-877-655-CHOP (2467).



Pete Van Wieren, with his wife Elaine, in their suburban Atlanta home.

PROFESSOR EMERITUS

After 33 Years In the Braves' Booth, Hall of Famer Pete Van Wieren Signs Off To Embrace Retirement

BY PATTY RASMUSSEN

Friends and colleagues knew Pete Van Wieren and his wife, Elaine, had a special off-season trip planned, but they had no idea how special it would be. It turned out that their 17-day Mediterranean cruise was the beginning to the Braves Hall of Fame broadcaster's retirement, announced at an Oct. 21 press conference. It was the sort of trip Pete, 64, said he's looking forward to taking more of now that he isn't inhibited by the grueling spring-to-autumn baseball schedule.

"We've always wanted to visit Holland, where my family came from," said Van Wieren. "But that's a trip you want to make in the spring, otherwise you're skating on the canals instead of looking at tulips!"

Nicknamed "The Professor" for his encyclopedic knowledge of baseball and his professional demeanor, Van Wieren called it a career after 33 years broadcasting Braves games on both radio and television.

"There's really no exit strategy for this job," he said. "People get this job and they stay in it until they want to walk away or until they can't do it anymore. I never wanted to be in the position where I couldn't do it any more, because if you can't do this, you can't do anything! All you're doing is sitting and talking!"

Though it came as a surprise to most everyone, Van Wieren knew he was inching toward retirement before the season began, even as Braves officials approached him with the offer of a contract extension. He and Elaine had talked about his retirement for several years, but the discussion got serious last off-season.

"I wanted to be able to do things, travel, spend time with my grandchildren and children, while I was still healthy and able to do it," said Van Wieren, who was up-front with the Braves, telling them he didn't want to take the offer of an extension because he was seriously considering retirement.

By the All-Star break, he'd made up his mind.

"I was very glad," said Elaine of Pete's decision to retire. "It was time."

"I went back to (the Braves) right after the All-Star break," said Pete. "We had several more meetings as the year went on. I met with John (Schuerholz, team president), and everyone asked me to wait until the season was over, take a step back for a couple of weeks to see if I still felt the same way. I did that and gave it the full two weeks. At the end, I still felt the same way, so we moved ahead."

Once the die was cast, Van Wieren didn't miss a beat.

"I went to talk to Derek Schiller (executive vice-president, sales/marketing) on Thursday (Oct. 17) and told him my mind was made up," he recalled. "Derek asked me the best time to make the announcement, and I told him, 'Well, if you don't do it the following Monday or Tuesday, I won't be available.'"

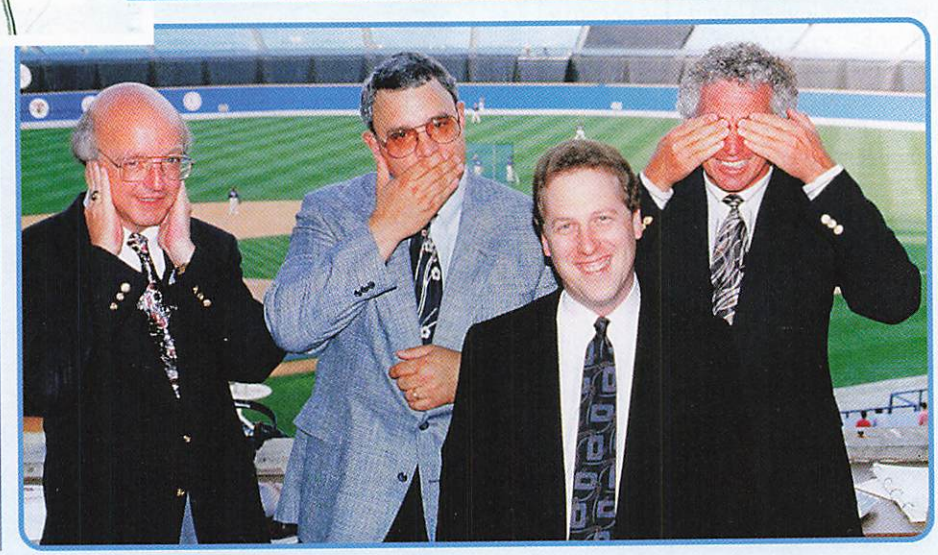
He left himself no time for second thoughts. The same week he announced his retirement, the Van Wierens were hosting a houseful of company for his mother's 90th birthday party, a baby shower for daughter-in-law, Starla Van Wieren, wife of their son Steve, and preparing to depart on Oct. 28 for their Mediterranean cruise. Suffice to say, it was a busy week at the Van Wieren home!

But it was a happy and remarkably relaxed week, as well. Pete's mother, Ruth Shannon, and aunt, Mary Sandy, arrived in the days immediately following the retirement announcement and were able to experience the overwhelming tributes that poured in as the news spread through Atlanta and the baseball community. They read the stories online on the Atlanta

SPECIAL

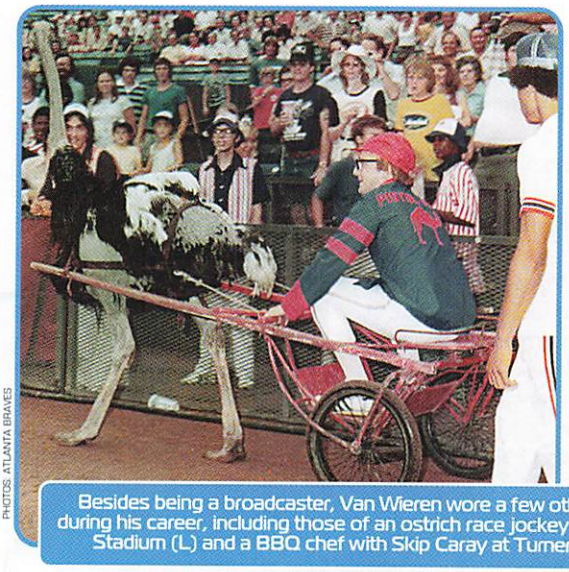
ATLANTA BRAVES

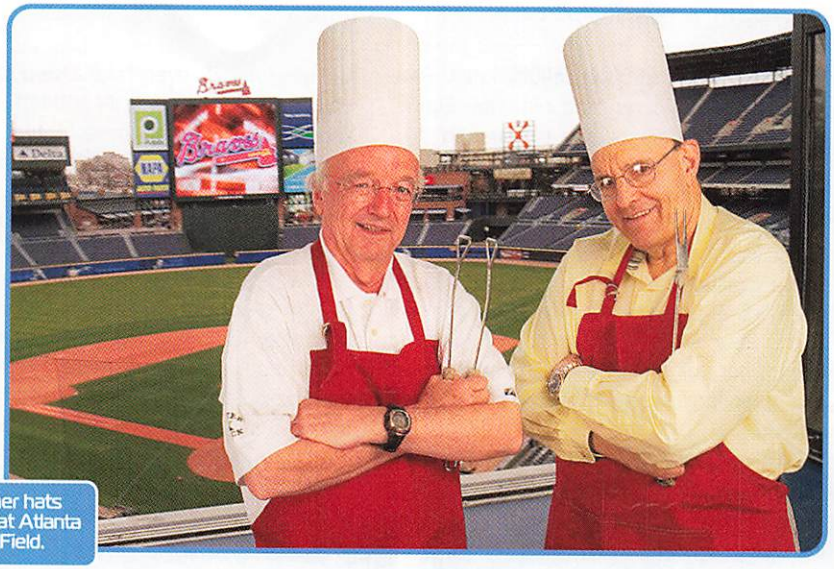
Van Wieren, who joined the Braves' broadcast team in 1975, was the drummer in "The Hustlers" (above) during his college days at Cornell and "heard no evil" (below) in the booth with cohorts (L-R) Skip Caray, producer Glenn Diamond and Don Sutton.



ATLANTA BRAVES

PATTY RASMUSSEN





PHOTOS: ATLANTA BRAVES

Besides being a broadcaster, Van Wieren wore a few other hats during his career, including those of an ostrich race jockey at Atlanta Stadium (L) and a BBQ chef with Skip Caray at Turner Field.

Journal-Constitution website and were astonished by the notes left by readers.

"We printed out pages and pages of the comments made by readers," said Elaine.

"I intentionally told as few people as possible," said Pete. "Only my family and Derek Schiller, Terry McGuirk (chairman) and John Schuerholz knew. I didn't want word to get out, because I didn't want there to be a bunch of fuss. I always believed it was the people on the field who were supposed to get all the fanfare."

But once the news broke, Pete fielded calls from Joe Simpson, John Smoltz, former Braves broadcaster John Sterling, Boston Red Sox radio broadcaster Joe Castiglione, Phillies play-by-play announcer Tom McCarthy, and many others.

"The first call I got was from Mark Lemke," said Pete. "He asked, 'Pete, what's up?' It was a little unfortunate with regard to the timing of (the announcement), because it looked like it was because I was ill, or because of Skip's (Caray) death, or the way the season went. But that wasn't it at all. Losing Skip when we did was a tough thing to go through, but it didn't influence my decision in any way, because my decision was pretty well made before that. It did reinforce my belief that I didn't want to do this until I couldn't do it anymore."

The response from those who worked with Pete was immediate and universal.

At the press conference, Schuerholz said, "We are thankful and appreciative for Pete's great work, the voice he gave to our organization, the passion he brought to the presentation of our games. We did invite Pete to remain with the organization in whatever capacity he feels comfortable with."

Van Wieren quickly cut in and broke up the room when he said, "I'm thinking of team president..."

"I kind of like the job myself," answered Schuerholz.

Van Wieren directed his warmest remarks at the press conference to Braves fans.

"You can't do this job successfully without support from the fans, and they have been tremendously supportive of our broadcasts going all the way back to 1976, my first year here," he said. "Even during the trying times, they've really been supportive. It's been a great ride, and I've enjoyed every minute of it."

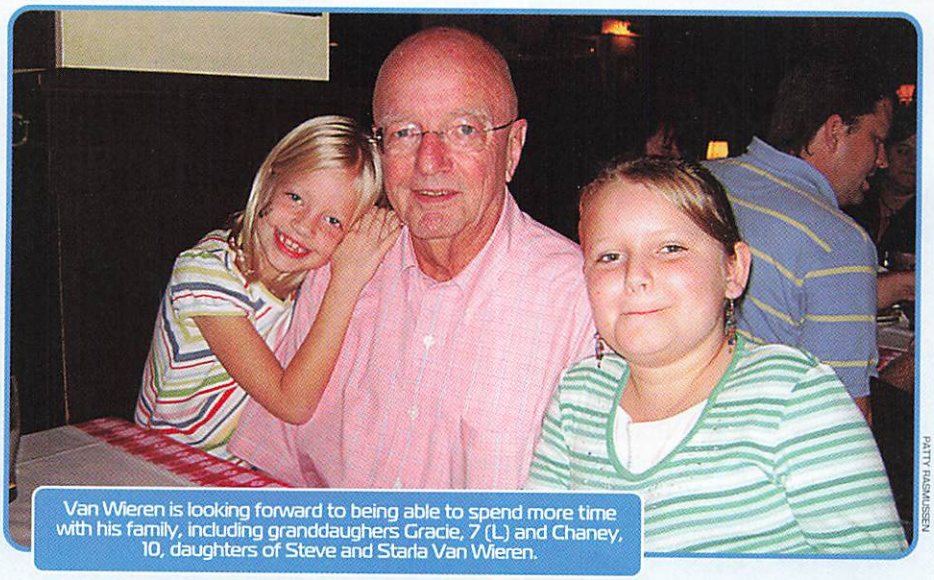
"Enormous shoes have to be filled now, and those of us that are, hopefully, still going to be here, will endeavor to carry on what Ernie (Johnson), Skip and Pete started," said Simpson. "It will not be easy, because of the high bar they established."

Johnson was inducted into the Braves Hall of Fame in 2001, and Caray and Van Wieren were inducted together in 2004.

Simpson said his lasting impression of Van Wieren is his day-to-day professionalism. "Ordinarily, Pete was the first guy at the park every day," he said. "On those days when I beat him to the park, I made sure he knew it! It was a rare occasion, so I'd always ask him, 'Where have you been today?' His work ethic, his preparation, his attention to detail... I hoped it rubbed off on me."

Dave Baker was the Braves radio producer for 10 years from 1995 until 2004 and quickly came to regard Van Wieren as a close friend.

"You can't travel and work in close quarters with someone like that for 10 years and not become family," said Baker. "For eight months out of the year, I saw him every day, more than I saw my own family."



PATTY RASMUSSEN

Van Wieren is looking forward to being able to spend more time with his family, including granddaughers Gracie, 7 (L) and Chaney, 10, daughters of Steve and Starla Van Wieren.

Baker said Van Wieren always came to the park ready to work.

"He never did things just to do them," said Baker. "I knew that when Pete got behind the microphone, I was going to get the best that he could possibly do, and he would continue doing it unselfishly until the project or game was done. Fortunately for me and the rest of Braves nation, his best was pretty darn strong."

In making his announcement, Van Wieren gave a great deal of credit to his family, Elaine, and their sons Jon (41) and Steve (38), who became baseball gypsies with him during his minor league years.

"I want to be sure to thank my family. They've put up with a lot over these last 43 years, and finally I'll be able to give back some time to them," he said at his press conference, thanking them each by name. "I'll have more time to spend with them, and I'm looking forward to that."

Van Wieren's sons, both of whom consider themselves statistics geeks like their dad, can attest to the up-side and the down-side of baseball life.

"I was 9-years-old when we moved to Atlanta," said Jon. "But we had lived in Binghamton, N.Y., Toledo, Ohio, and Virginia Beach, Virginia, before moving to Atlanta. We moved every two years."

Van Wieren missed a lot of his sons' games while broadcasting, but Elaine was there to pick up the slack.

"It was a trade-off, but we never knew any differently," said Jon. "If it was a downside for us, it was even more of a downside for him."

Both sons can cite favorite Pete on-air moments. Steve's favorite was from the 1982 season when the Braves won their 13th consecutive game to open the season. For Jon, it was his dad's interview, also in 1982, with pitcher Pascual Perez on the day after Perez missed a start when he famously got "lost" on I-285, the perimeter highway that circles Atlanta.

"It was hilarious," said Jon. "I have a copy of it somewhere on a cassette tape."

Some of Van Wieren's greatest admirers are also among the game's greats.

"He was nicknamed 'The Professor' for a reason," said Glavine, who praised Van Wieren's knowledge and style. "And he talked about the game in a way that isn't used much anymore. There's a critical element so prevalent these days. Pete didn't do that. He could be critical of a play or action, but not in a way that made the player look bad, and I know that the players appreciated that."

Glavine said it wasn't uncommon for him to stop in the hotel lobby after a road game and talk baseball with Van Wieren.

"I enjoyed his company and enjoyed talking to him," recalled Glavine. "I came through the Braves when the culture of baseball was different. You'd sit and talk. It was helpful for me, and I took any chance I had to spend time with him."

Bobby Cox expressed his happiness that Pete was able to call his own shots with regard to retirement but added, "It's really sad news for Braves fans everywhere. He'll be greatly missed by all of us."

So what's next for Van Wieren?

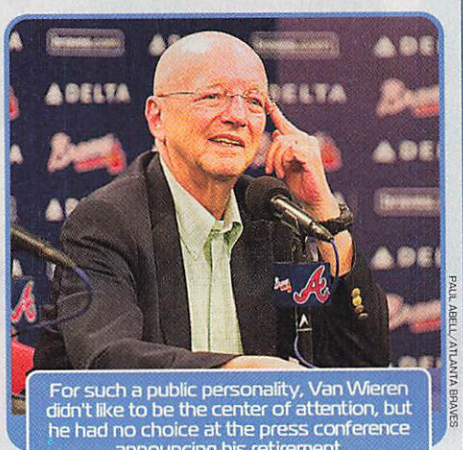
Travel, for certain, and on his schedule, not on the Braves' schedule. Pete and Elaine are talking about that trip to Holland, as well as an Alaskan cruise, and a few places a little closer to home.

"There are some little things I'd like to do," said Pete. "I'd like to visit my alma mater, Cornell University, and Binghamton, where I started out. I've never been able to go to the Masters or the Kentucky Derby, and I think that would be fun."

Van Wieren, who began his career with the Tidewater Tides of the International League, has been approached about writing a book, and he's considering it. But for now, he's content to know that he doesn't have to check the baseball schedule before making plans.

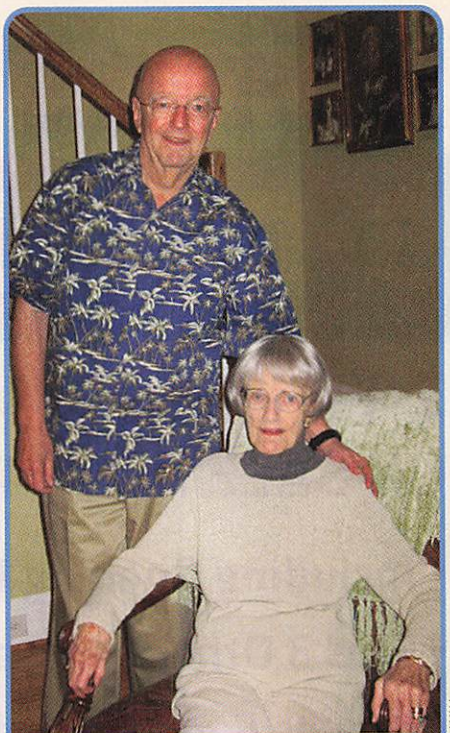
He will remain connected to the Braves organization and will talk with them about what sort of role he could fill, possibly creating, strengthening, and maintaining relationships with former Braves players or developing some sort of Braves alumni association.

"I don't think I'll be bored," said Van Wieren. "But I've told Elaine that there will probably be a day in March when we get up in the morning and it's 43 degrees outside and raining and I turn on the TV and they're televising a game from Orlando and I'll say, 'What in the world did I do?'"



PAUL ABELL/ATLANTA BRAVES

For such a public personality, Van Wieren didn't like to be the center of attention, but he had no choice at the press conference announcing his retirement.



PATTY RASMUSSEN

Van Wieren's mother, Ruth Shannon, celebrated her 90th birthday at his home the same week his retirement was announced.

Whatever Van Wieren ends up doing with his retirement, he is satisfied with his career in sports broadcasting, which fulfilled a boyhood dream.

"My dream was to be the Rochester (N.Y.) Redwings announcer," said Pete, who was born in Rochester. "I was never able to get that job, thank goodness! This Braves job turned out pretty well. At first, it was a little bit difficult. You began to wonder if it would ever turn around during those first 15 years (except for the '82 season). But the remarkable run we had, starting in 1991... how many broadcasters get to experience a run like that?"

True to his statistical-loving nature, Van Wieren added it up.

"I've done 33 years of broadcasting here, but it's actually 34 years if you add up all the post-season games," he said. "That was a real trip. To go through that, to be part of that... that's an unforgettable memory."

Van Wieren created unforgettable memories for his co-workers and fans, as well.

"There are roughly 100-ish guys out there doing Major League Baseball on TV and/or radio," said Baker. "You can count on one hand the ones that are as good as Pete - and you would have a couple of fingers left over."

BRAVES HOLIDAY
6-GAME PACK

as low as
$152

2 TICKETS TO 6 BRAVES GAMES
ON SALE NOV 14 - DEC 15

- Including Opening Day • Games versus Yankees & Boston Red Sox
- Plus 3 Other Games • Gift Box • Holiday Card
- Braves Cap • Braves Gift Wrap

404.577.9100 **braves.com/holidays**

© 2008, Atlanta National League Baseball Club, Inc. All rights reserved. ™ The Braves script and tomahawk are trademarks of the Atlanta National League Baseball Club, Inc. All rights reserved.

PAINTING THE CORNERS

BY JAY BUSBEE

RENEWED REVERENCE FOR THE STREAK

BASEBALL HAS its magical numbers, statistics that summon up entire stories with just a few digits: 56... 714... 755... 61... .366.

Folks, after watching this past post-season, it's time to add a new number to that list: 14, as in the Braves' run of consecutive division titles.

It's not an unbreakable mark – indeed, several of the records in that little list above have already fallen. But with each passing year, the Braves' run looks as unassailable as DiMaggio's 56-game hitting streak or Cobb's .366 career batting average.

The 1991 Braves, who began the run, came up often in baseball conversation this past post-season as a similarly young team of giant-killers – the Tampa Bay Rays – stormed from the cellar to the penthouse.

Like the 1980s Braves, the Rays had a history that couldn't even be called pathetic. But like the 1991 Braves, the Rays rode powerful pitching and timely hitting to a division title and a pennant.

Unfortunately for the Rays, they couldn't put together a Braves-like 1991 World Series. There was no classic Game 7 equivalent of Smoltz-versus-Morris. The Phillies dusted Tampa Bay in five.

Even worse for Tampa fans, the Rays don't appear in any way set up for a long run. Their 2009 team will resemble the 2008 version, but before long, their young hotshots will expect significant raises. And when you're running out a payroll that's one-fourth that of the Yankees, it's not likely you'll be able to hang onto your best talent, even if the Rays enjoy increased revenue from their fans.

And there's no guarantee they will.

The Rays haven't achieved the kind of broad-based support that the Braves roped in over the course of 1991. Sure, Tampa Bay fans carved "Rayhawks" into their heads, which, granted, is a more extreme show of commitment than a tomahawk chop. But even with their season-long success, the Rays ranked 12th of 14 in American League attendance, and it wasn't until very late in the season that they began selling out games.

There's no generational tradition of attending Rays games – I've got socks older than that team – and no sign that Tampa will embrace the Rays the same way Atlanta embraced the Braves.

All of which goes to show just how unique the Braves' run is.

Here's a good statistic to break out to your anti-Braves friends: The longest current playoff streak in baseball, held by the Boston Red Sox and the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim, stands at a mighty two. That's

right – as of 2009, no team has reached the playoffs more than two seasons in a row. The Angels would have to win their division every year through 2020 just to match Atlanta's run.

In the three years since the Braves have been in the playoffs, 16 different teams have rotated in and out of the post-season.

"The farther we get from that run, the more people are going to respect it," said Paul Byrd, a former Braves pitcher (1997-98, 2004) who played for the Red Sox this past October. "You take it for granted when you're in the middle of it, but once you step away and start to see how hard it is to get to the post-season, you realize what an achievement that streak was."

The farther that you drill down into the Braves' playoff run, the more impressive it becomes. Atlanta outplayed six different viable division rivals – Dodgers, Reds, Giants, Mets, Phillies and Marlins – over the course of their run. And during that same period, almost every single team in the majors made the playoffs, the exceptions being Milwaukee, Montreal/Washington, Kansas City and Tampa Bay (which began play in 1998).

And yes, the 1991-2005 Braves only have that one championship ring, and that's very frustrating to everyone involved. But there are signs that the perception of that could be changing, too.

One-and-done now seems to be the trend rather than an anomaly. In the 2000s, eight different teams have won the World Series, with only the Red Sox repeating. And while there's never been more money in baseball than there is today, there's also never been more pressure to deliver on that investment, which brought the Yankees down in a crumbling heap this year.

> "THERE'S NO GENERATIONAL TRADITION OF ATTENDING RAYS GAMES – I'VE GOT SOCKS OLDER THAN THAT TEAM."

That's so unlikely as to border on impossible. On one hand, you've got teams in an arms race for new talent. The big spenders will always put the pressure on the smaller-market squads. And on the other hand, there's always the small-market squad that strikes gold one year. Add those up, and you've got a dogfight for October, every single year.

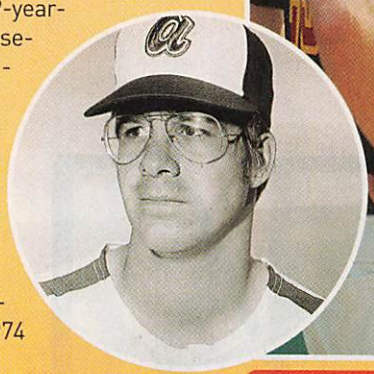
Sustaining a four-year playoff run is going to be tough. A 14-year one is going to require some once-in-a-generation talent across the board.

So take heart, Braves fans – our team holds one of baseball's virtually unbreakable records. And if anybody ever challenges it, we'll see them coming from a decade away.

THE GOOD DOCTOR

FROM A BRAVES PERSPECTIVE, Tom House is best remembered for catching Hank Aaron's 715th home run in the left field bullpen at Atlanta Stadium. That's a shame, because House actually was a pretty good left-handed reliever (18-11, 3.06 from 1971-75), and beyond that, he may hold the major league record for college degrees (4).

Dr. House made the news recently as the "mad professor" who's trying to turn two 19-year-olds from India who never touched a baseball until a year ago into professional - perhaps even major league - pitchers.



Now the pitching coach at his alma mater, Southern Cal, the 61-year-old House holds a bachelor's degree (management), two masters degrees (marketing and performance psychology), and a doctorate in psychology. If you're wondering, Dr. Mike Marshall, also a former Braves reliever (1976-77) and the 1974 NL Cy Young winner, has three degrees.

House has been working with lefthander Rinku Singh, and righthander Dinesh Patel, who were contestants on a TV show in India called "Million Dollar Arm." Singh, who won the competition, and Patel received all-expense trips to the U.S. to train with House for six months. On Nov. 9, 38 scouts for big league teams watched the two throw.

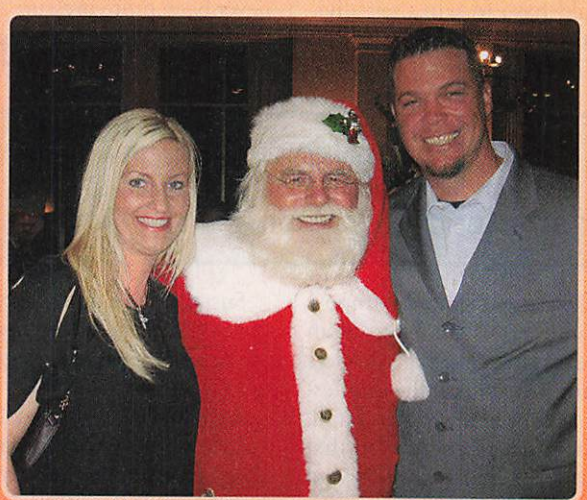
Patel's fastball peaked at 90 mph, and Singh's at 84, both significantly slower than reported in practice sessions. Nerves and mounds they weren't familiar with were blamed, and another tryout session was planned soon.

House, who's been a big league pitching coach for the Astros, Padres and Rangers, predicted in USA Today, "Somebody is going to take a shot. There's just too much upside."

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA; INSET: ATLANTA BRAVES

Tom House, who returned to his alma mater of Southern Cal as pitching coach in the summer of 2007, is putting his extensive knowledge gained from four degrees and a wide range of professional experience to the ultimate test.

IN THE SPIRIT



SPECIAL

BRIAN AND ASHLEY McCann served as honorary chairs of the Rally Foundation Benefit Bash held Nov. 13 at the Atlanta History Center. The event was a sellout, with 350 people attending, and it raised $183,000 for childhood cancer research.

Among the guests were Chipper Jones and his wife, Sharon (L), Blaine and Ginsey Boyer, Kelly Johnson and wife, Lauren, September callup Brandon Jones, free agent pitcher Kris Benson, and Leo Mazzone.

Chipper made a splash at the live auction by bidding on, and winning, a visit from Santa and Mrs. Claus, and not one, but two, Labradoodle pups.

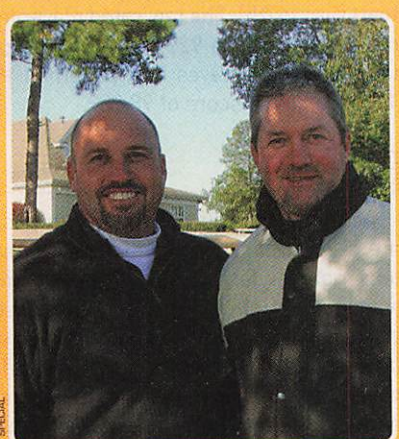
"I think we're going to name them Mickey and Murray after Mickey Mantle and Eddie Murray (the only two switch-hitters with more home runs than Chipper)," said Chipper, though his sons Trey, Shea, and Tristan were expected to weigh in on the matter.

HITTIN' 'EM

SPECIAL

Braves and former Braves turned out strong for the Hit 'em for Hemophilia golf tournament, including (above) Chipper Jones and Mark DeRosa (R), and (below) Fredi Gonzalez (L) and Roger McDowell.

THE HIT 'EM for Hemophilia Golf Tournament took place at Chateau Elan, Oct. 28. The tournament, hosted by Bill Acree, long-time Braves director of team travel and equipment manager, took up all three golf courses and included the likes of Phil Niekro, Jeff Francoeur, Clint Sammons, John Schuerholz, Bruce Benedict, Terry Pendleton, Roger McDowell, Frank Wren, Chino Cadahia, Glenn Hubbard, Zane Smith, Greg McMichael, Mark Lemke and former Braves third base coach Fredi Gonzalez, now manager of the Florida Marlins.



SPECIAL

HOW DO THEY DO THAT?

PREPARE TURNER FIELD

AUSTIN SHARPE

TO GET TURNER FIELD prepared for a 7:35 night game, director of engineering Eric Perestuk and his staff start working right around sunrise. They're not satisfied until everything is clean, functioning properly, and ready for the fans and players. To make that happen, Perestuk, facility manager Dawn Gepfer, and chief engineer Mitch Norton complete checklists that include as many 60 items.

"The park has to be safe for employees and fans of upwards of 50,000 people," said Perestuk. "And it has to be ready and everything must be accomplished three hours before first pitch."

First they prepare the parking lots and areas outside the stadium for fan safety by putting up barricades and cones. They reset turnstiles, and check that all elevators and escalators work properly. Seating gets inspected all around the ballpark for damage and cleanliness. Areas used by the players - such as the clubhouses, dugouts and bullpens - must also be ready to go.

Perestuk's department checks water pressure and power into the building, as well as water temperatures. All the concession areas must have sufficient water and electricity. The games in Tooner Field, the children's area, and other fan amenities get turned on and checked for proper operation. They also examine fire and life safety systems in case of an emergency.

Turner Field's playing surface receives light from 437 lamps of 1,600 watts each. The stadium also includes numerous lights on advertising panels. Perestuk's team turns on all of them, making sure that each one works.

The stadium features 600 television sets, which get turned on manually. This provides an opportunity to inspect for unrelated problems around the stadium needing attention. Anything requiring repair or replacement gets handled long before the first fan enters the park.

"We won't go into a game with so much as one bulb out," said Perestuk. "If there's a light bulb up there, then it's supposed to be on."

- STEVE FALL

FEELING CHIPPER

SPECIAL

Chipper and Sharon Jones watch as their son, Trey, participates in a magician's trick during events at Chipper's annual golf tournament for charity.

SHOWING NO ILL-EFFECTS from the right shoulder tendinitis that limited him to pinch-hitting duties during the final eight games of the season, **Chipper Jones** hosted and played in the annual Chipper Jones Family Foundation golf tournament Nov. 3 at Bear's Best Golf Club in Suwanee. However, Chipper had his two-year winning streak in the event broken when the team that included bench coach **Chino Cadahia** finished first.

Celebrity golfers included Jones, **Tom Glavine** and **Clint Sammons**, coaches **Glenn Hubbard**, **Terry Pendleton** and Cadahia, and former Braves **Mark DeRosa**, **Todd Pratt**, **Brad Clontz**, **Greg McMichael** and **Chris Resop**. **Jonathan Broxton**, the Dodgers closer, also played in the tournament.

Jones' parents, **Larry** and **Lynne**, were in town for the event. Larry played golf while Lynne spent the day relaxing in the warm sun. Chipper's wife, **Sharon**, and their oldest son, **Trey**, followed Chipper's foursome around the course and remained for the dinner and awards ceremony. Each member of the winning foursome received a $1,000 Best Buy gift card.

LEADING OFF

The date of the Braves' season-opener has been changed to Sunday, April 5, making it the first game of the Major League Baseball season and putting it on a national cable TV stage. The game at Philadelphia against the World Champion Phillies will be shown by ESPN2 with a scheduled start of 8 p.m. No other teams will open the season until April 6 or later.

The opening series in Philadelphia has been juggled so that April 6 is an off day, followed by a 7:05 p.m. game on April 7 and a 3:05 p.m. game on April 8. The Braves will be off on April 9, and then open their home season at Turner Field Friday, April 10, against Washington. Game time has not been announced. See pages 49-50 for the complete 2009 schedule. Information on individual game tickets has not been announced.

This is the second straight year the Braves have had their season-opener moved to accommodate national TV. Last year, they started the season with one game in Washington to open the Nationals' new ballpark. That game was the first of the season to be played in North America.

IN THE RUNNING

Jair Jurrjens finished third in voting for National League Rookie of the Year. Cubs catcher **Geovany Soto** won the award, and Cincinnati first baseman **Joey Votto** was second. Soto was a near-unanimous pick, receiving 31 of 32 first-place votes. Jurrjens received six second-place and 16 third-place votes.

A 22-year-old righthander, Jurrjens led all major league rookies in ERA (3.68) and tied for first with 13 wins. Acquired from Detroit last October along with minor league outfielder **Gorkys Hernandez** in exchange for **Edgar Renteria**, the Curacao native made a pro-career-high 31 starts and worked a personal-high 188 1/3 innings.

RATINGS GAME

In the annual Elias Sports Bureau ranking of players, primarily used to determine free agent compensation, **Chipper Jones** is rated the third-best infielder (second base, third base, shortstop) in the National League. His 86.813 score, compiled from a formula based on his stats over the last two seasons, trails only **Chase Utley** and **David Wright** among infielders.

Brian McCann ranks third among NL catcher, and **Tim Hudson** is ninth among NL starting pitchers. Other Braves and their rankings are: **Rafael Soriano** (15th among NL relievers), **Kelly Johnson** (18th), **John Smoltz** (22nd among NL starting pitchers), **Peter Moylan** (25th), **Yunel Escobar** (27th), **Mike Gonzalez** (34th), **Jeff Francoeur** (34th among outfielders) and **Matt Diaz** (47th). The top-rated player in the majors among the 929 ranked at any position is former Braves first baseman **Mark Teixeira** with a score of 98.889.

BOLD MOVE

According to published reports, the Braves are believed to have offered Japanese amateur righthander **Junichi Tazawa** a major league contract. Tazawa, 22, has a fastball clocked in the low- to mid-90s. He elected to bypass playing pro ball in Japan, a first for a player from that country, and the Braves are believed to be the only team to offer him a major league contract. **Frank Wren** saw the 5-11, 180-pound Tazawa pitch in Japan in

September, and the Braves have continued to scout him.

SHORT HOPS

- The Kansas City Royals claimed right-handed pitcher **Jairo Cuevas** off outright waivers from the Braves Oct. 24.
- No Brave won a Gold Glove for the first time since 1991.
- **Bobby Cox**'s tenure of 19 seasons (1990-2008) as Braves manager is second in pro sports among active managers and head coaches to Jerry Sloan's 21 years with Utah of the NBA.

CONTRACT TRACKER

SIGNED (THROUGH)
TIM HUDSON (2009*)
CHIPPER JONES
BRIAN MCCANN (2012#)
RAFAEL SORIANO (2009)
* Club option for 2010.
# Option for 2013.

FREE AGENTS
TOM GLAVINE
MIKE HAMPTON
JORGE JULIO
GREG NORTON
WILL OHMAN
JOHN SMOLTZ
JULIAN TAVAREZ

ELIGIBLE FOR ARBITRATION
MATT DIAZ
JEFF FRANCOEUR
MIKE GONZALEZ
OMAR INFANTE
KELLY JOHNSON
CASEY KOTCHMAN

UNSIGNED
(Less than 3 years service; eligible for renewal)
MANNY ACOSTA
JOSH ANDERSON
JEFF BENNETT
GREGOR BLANCO
BLAINE BOYER
FRANCISLEY BUENO
JORGE CAMPILLO
BUDDY CARLYLE
YUNEL ESCOBAR
CHUCK JAMES
BRANDON JONES
JAIR JURRJENS
ANTHONY LEREW
BRENT LILLIBRIDGE
CHARLIE MORTON
PETER MOYLAN
JAMES PARR
MARTIN PRADO
JO-JO REYES
JEFF RIDGWAY
CLINT SAMMONS
PHIL STOCKMAN
LUIS VALDEZ

FRANK WREN
GENERAL MANAGER

WE'VE CONNECTED WITH TOP FREE AGENT PITCHERS

THE ANNUAL General Managers Meetings took place November 3-6 in Dana Point, California. They were not unlike the meetings in the past in that there was a lot of groundwork put into place with other teams. We were able to leave with a sense that four or five things were starting to make sense with other clubs that we could develop. We're in the process of doing that now and trying to move the conversations into full-blown trade discussions.

We spent a lot of time the last six weeks in discussions with the Padres about acquiring Jake Peavy, their No.-1 starter. We exchanged names and felt we made some significant headway, but then it became apparent that we just were not going to get there at this time.

We decided to end the discussions and move on to the free agent market and get into trade talks with other clubs and shift the focus that we'd had for six weeks. That's not to say that we wouldn't accept a call if it comes, but that is not our focus.

We're certainly still looking for a No.-1 type starter who pitches at a high level and eats innings. But we're looking to find it on the free agent market or with other teams. We have made contact with the representatives of all pitchers that we have identified as being significant upgrades for us.

We're actively talking to those folks, as well as seeking potential trades for pitchers and bats in the outfield, which is another area of need for us.

There are a lot of trade conversations going on throughout baseball, and from the people I've talked to, I wouldn't be surprised if things start to open up in that direction even before the Winter Meetings that start December 7 in Las Vegas. The free agent signing activity might be slow, though.

> "WE'RE CERTAINLY STILL LOOKING FOR A NO.-1 TYPE STARTER WHO PITCHES AT A HIGH LEVEL AND EATS INNINGS."

After leaving the General Manager's Meetings, I stopped in Arizona to watch our seven players who are in the Arizona Fall League. I would say they are representing the Atlanta Braves organization extremely well.

Tommy Hanson has been unbelievable. He'll be in our big league camp, and we'll see where he goes from there. He made his last start in Arizona today and struck out 10 in five innings and only gave up one hit. That's 30 strikeouts in his last three starts (15 innings) and only 6 hits allowed. He'll get exposed to major leaguers in spring training and then probably go to Gwinnett (Triple A) to start the season, and we'll see what develops.

Tyler Flowers had three more hits, including a home run. That's 12 home runs (71 at-bats), and he's only hitting about .400 (.394)! We'll probably pencil him in at Double-A (Mississippi) and ask him to continue to do what's he's been doing to develop the finer points of catching and handling a pitching staff, which he's doing a good job of now.

I think he has the most power potential of maybe any of our young hitters. Freddie Freeman and Jason Howard have power, but they're not what you'd call prototypical power hitters the way Flowers is. And Cody Johnson has power, but he hits line drives. Flowers has what scouts call "loft power." He hits those long, deep, arching flyballs. He's a classic power hitter. And he's got good plate discipline and a good idea of what he's doing up there, too.

Steve Marek has pitched very well out there, and so has Kris Medlen. Matt Young is hitting over .360, and Van Pope had three hits today, including a grand slam, to put him up near .300 (.286). It's been quite a group out there this year.

We offered a major league contract to a young Japanese pitcher named Junichi Tazawa. I saw him pitch three times when I was over there, two starts and once in relief. I think we may have a resolution by the first of December.

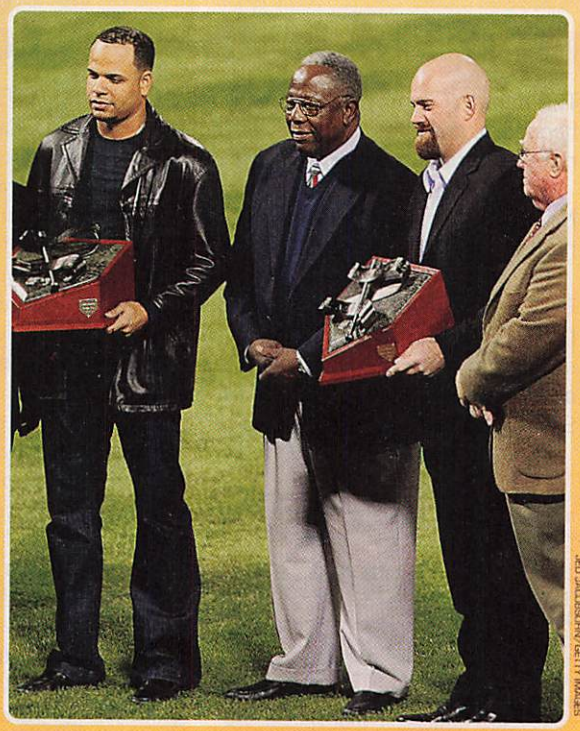
HAMMER TIME

THE BRAVES didn't make it to the World Series, but **Hank Aaron** did. Prior to Game 4 of the World Series at Philadelphia, Aaron presented the Major League Baseball award named in his honor to Boston's **Kevin Youkilis** and the Cubs' **Aramis Ramirez** as the best overall hitters in the American and National League respectively. It was the first time for both to win the Hank Aaron Award, which originated in 1999

Youkilis batted a career-high .312 and led the Red Sox with 29 home runs and 115 RBIs. He averaged an RBI ever 4.7 at-bats, the best ratio in the AL, and had 62 RBIs in his last 61 games. He batted .374 with runners in scoring position and was third in the AL in slugging percentage (.569) and sixth in on-base percentage (.390).

Ramirez led the Cubs with 111 RBIs, a career-best .380 on-base percentage, and a .518 slugging percentage. He hit 27 home runs, 11 of which gave the Cubs the lead. In close-and-late situations, he batted .423, and he had 56 RBIs in the Cubs' last 69 games.

Each team's broadcasters are polled, with their results counting 70 percent of the final tally. The other 30 percent comes from online voting by fans.



JED JACOBSOHN/GETTY IMAGES

Hank Aaron with 2008 Hank Aaron Award winners Aramis Ramirez (L) and Kevin Youkilis prior to Game 4 of the World Series.

HOLIDAY DEAL

The Braves are offering a six-game ticket package through Dec. 15 that includes the 2009 home opener and interleague games against Boston and the Yankees. The Holiday Six Game Gift Pack is available online at braves.com/holidays or by phone at (404) 577-9100. The package, priced as low as $152 for two tickets to six games, includes Opening Day (April 10 vs. Washington), one game against the Yankees (June 23-25), one versus the Red Sox (June 26-28), and three other pre-selected games.

CHIPPER'S REWARD

In addition to receiving the Silver Bat Award as the National League batting champion, Chipper Jones also will receive the **Walter "Buck" Leonard** Award from the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City. The museum annually presents its Legacy Awards to top performers in the majors, and the Leonard Award goes to the batting champ in each league.

Former Brave **Clarence "Cito" Gaston** (OF/1B, 1967, '75-78), now manager of the Toronto Blue Jays, will receive the museum's **Jackie Robinson** Award for lifetime achievement.

The Legacy Award winners will be recognized Jan. 10 during a ceremony at the Gem Theater, located across the street from the Negro Leagues Museum. Tickets are priced from $75 to $150 and can be reserved by calling the museum at (816) 221-1920. Visit nlbm.com for information. Proceeds from the event benefit the museum, which keeps alive the legacy of men and women who played, coached or owned teams when baseball was a segregated sport.

SPECIAL ASSISTANT

Frank Wren hired **Dominic "Dom" Chiti** as a special assistant on Nov. 7. Chiti, 49, spent the last six seasons in the Texas Rangers organization. He was their major league bullpen coach the last three years, and prior to that was their director of player personnel for a year and a half, providing recommendations for potential trades and free agent signings while also overseeing player development, scouting and Latin America operations. He's also been an advance scout and a special assistant to the Rangers' GM.

Prior to joining the Rangers, Chiti spent 12 years with the Cleveland Indians, from 1989 to 2001. He served as the Indians' American League advance scout from 1996-2001 after joining the team in 1989 as a roving minor league instructor. He was promoted to the major league club's bullpen coach in 1992 and was an advance scout in 1994. In 1995, he was Triple-A Buffalo's pitching coach.

Chiti, the son of former major leaguer Harry Chiti, was drafted out of high school by the Braves as a left-handed pitcher in the second round in 1976 and pitched in the Braves' farm system through 1980.

CHIPPER'S TIPS

Chipper Jones will hold a hitting clinic Saturday, Dec. 13, from 1-2:30 p.m., at his 10th Inning Baseball Academy located in the Atlanta suburb of Suwanee at 50 F Satellite Blvd. The National League batting champ will "talk hitting and answer questions from attendees" during the 90-minute session. All attendees will receive an autographed photo. The cost is $125 per player, and there is a limit of 100 players. Call (678)

714-1000 to register or visit 10thinningbaseball.com for information.

The academy staff also will hold a clinic from 2:30-5 p.m. for $100 per player. The cost for those who take both clinics is $200.

THE MILWAUKEE STORY

Filmmaker and Milwaukee Braves Historical Association member **William Povletich** has teamed up with Milwaukee Public Television to produce Milwaukee Braves: The Team That Made Milwaukee Famous. The hour-long documentary focuses on how the franchise's relocation from Boston to Milwaukee in 1953 served as the catalyst for baseball to reexamine itself as a big business – resulting in a flurry of franchises relocating west, multi-league expansion, and teams cooperating with cities to build civically funded stadiums and tax subsidies.

The documentary, which is currently in production, includes on-camera interviews with former Braves players **Del Crandall**, **Ernie Johnson**, **Phil Niekro**, **Felix Mantilla** and **Joe Torre**; team executives **Bill Bartholomay** and **Dick Cecil**; sportswriters **Furman Bisher**, **Don Walker** and **Howard Bryant**; as well as **David Perini**, son of former Braves owner **Lou Perini**, and **Bob Quinn**, grandson of former Braves general manager **John Quinn**.

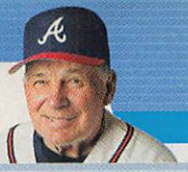
The documentary is scheduled to premiere in the spring to coincide with the release of Povletich's book "Milwaukee Braves: Heroes and Heartbreak" from the Wisconsin Historical Society Press. For information, visit the Milwaukee Braves Historical Association's website at 57braves.com.

BALLS & STRIKES

- **Terry Pendleton** and **Jeff Francoeur** made appearances at a dinner to benefit Boy Scouts of America on Nov. 11 in Orangeburg, S.C.

- February is Black History Month, and the Braves Museum is offering free admission during the month and a free tour of Turner Field to children 13-under who read a book about the Negro Leagues, **Hank Aaron**, **Jackie Robinson**, or any African American contributors to the sport. Students can bring in the book they read or a note with the name and author of the book from their teacher or librarian on school letterhead, Monday-Saturday during February.

BOBBY COX



MANAGER

I'M DOING WELL AFTER SURGERY ON MY KNEES

I HAD WHAT AMOUNTED to double knee replacement surgery on October 11. The original knee replacement surgery was done back in 1993. At the time, I was told that the replacements would need to be overhauled in eight to 10 years.

Fortunately, I didn't need to have everything taken out. The doctors replaced the plastic parts, which represent the cartilage in the units. The surgery went really well, and since then, I've been rehabbing.

I'm already walking pretty well. I was fortunate that the physical therapists have come to my house up to this point. They would come to our house in Marietta three days a week, and I'd do a 45-minute therapy session with them. I also worked out on my own. I did a lot of bending, lifting and stretching.

It's really important to work the knees, or else scar tissue builds up around the unit and you can't walk. I worked pretty hard, and it's paying off. I expect to be full speed ahead by Christmas.

Because of the surgery, I wasn't able to really do any traveling. My wife, Pam, and I will spend most of the off-season in the Atlanta area. I haven't even been up to the farm in Adairsville!

We're going to Las Vegas in early December to attend the Major League Baseball Winter Meetings. We always enjoy being with our friends in baseball. There's an awful lot to do in Las Vegas, even without baseball in town. But I think there will be a lot happening at the meetings.

At this point, there's not a lot to report, but I know that Frank Wren and his guys have been working on finding what we need every day. Our number-one priority is quality starting pitching. We have to have that to be competitive.

> "I WORKED PRETTY HARD, AND IT'S PAYING OFF. I EXPECT TO BE FULL SPEED AHEAD BY CHRISTMAS."

We have a lot of pitchers rehabbing this off-season, and I've heard good reports on them. We'll have a better idea of what our team will look like later in the off-season, but I know that John Smoltz and Tom Glavine are feeling really good. Peter Moylan was in Australia working out and may be back here by now.

Most guys work out here in Atlanta during the off-season. Brian McCann has already dropped 20 pounds, trying to ease some of the pressure on his knees and ankle.

The reports from the Arizona Fall League on our players there have been mostly positive. Folks are raving about Tommy Hanson.

One of the things I do in the off-season is work with different charities. Because of my surgery, I wasn't able to have my Homeless Pets event, but I was the honorary chairman of the Daniel Hager Memorial Scholarship Celebrity Golf Tournament which was very successful. It was held on October 27 and helps fund a scholarship for freshmen at Georgia Tech.

And I'll be involved in raising money for the Cindy Donald Dreams of Recovery Foundation this off-season, too. I met Cindy a few years ago after she was paralyzed in an accident. She's from my community, and we wanted to do what we could to help her family take care of her expenses. Now they've started a foundation to help more people with spinal injuries. Fredi, Ned Yost, and I are all members of their advisory board.

I did an autograph signing in November, and all the proceeds from my signing went to the Cindy Donald Foundation. In January, they have a big benefit, an auction and magic show, for the foundation. It's a lot of fun and goes to a great girl and a great cause. This year I think Roger McDowell will be there, too.

On behalf of all the Braves, I want to wish all of our loyal fans and ChopTalk readers happy holidays!

Emcee Ernie Johnson Jr. (center) referees the jabs between comedian Jeff Foxworthy (L) and a suspiciously hairy John Smoltz (R).

Laughing Matter

Foxworthy Challenges Smoltz: Are You Smarter Than a 5th Grader?

BY PATTY RASMUSSEN

If there was ever any doubt about John Smoltz's willingness to laugh at himself, a light blue warmup suit put that to rest the evening of Nov. 9 when he squeezed his 6-foot-3-inch, 220-pound frame into the same "Falcons" basketball warmup he wore as an eighth grader back in Lansing, Michigan.

"How did you get that much butt into that uniform?" joked comedian Jeff Foxworthy, Smoltz's buddy and co-host of the Evening with Smoltz, Foxworthy, & Friends event at the Verizon Wireless Amphitheater at Encore Park in the Atlanta suburb of Alpharetta. The crowd roared, and it was on with the show!

Under a cold, starry sky, over 2,500 fans rocked and laughed for three hours and for a good cause. All the $110,000 proceeds from the evening's events went to the John Smoltz Foundation, which in turn helps support charities such as Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, King's Ridge Christian School, the Atlanta Community Food Bank, and the Police Athletic League.

"I've wanted to do something like this event for a long time," said Smoltz. "I love to laugh, and it's a great way to bring together some of my favorite people."

And one of his favorite people is Foxworthy, who remembered getting a call from Smoltz while on a hunting trip.

"All John told me was, 'Don't make any plans for November 9,'" said Foxworthy. "I generally say 'yes' to most everything he asks."

The two men have been friends since 1997 and share a love of laughter, practical jokes and a fierce but friendly competition in games and sports, all of which were highlighted throughout the evening, beginning with a private reception at Smoltz's home nearby.

"Did you stop by the gift shop?" cracked Foxworthy, a reference to the size of the house and grounds. "His house has its own time zone!"

Event sponsors mingled with special guests, including Tom Glavine, Jeff Francoeur and Brian McCann. Durwood Fincher, also known as "Mr. Doubletalk" and one of Smoltz's favorite foils for practical jokes, was there. Fincher posed as a "visitor from Washington, D.C.," mock interviewing guests before finally letting them in on the joke.

At 5:30, the VIPs headed to the amphitheatre for a pre-show cocktail reception and photos. Among the guests were the evening's emcee, TBS broadcaster Ernie Johnson Jr., and his parents, Braves Hall of Fame broadcaster Ernie and Lois Johnson; Blaine and Ginsey Boyer, and Blaine's mother, Claudia; former Braves pitcher Paul Byrd and wife, Kym; and even the governor of Georgia, Sonny Perdue, and his wife, Mary. Finally, it was time to bundle up and brave the cold night air.

South Georgia native and Universal South recording artist Angela Wolff and her band began the festivities with an energetic, 30-minute set of country and rock songs.

Then Ernie Jr. took the stage to introduce Smoltz and Foxworthy, the co-stars of the event. Smoltz broke up the crowd by wearing a visor with an attached wig of spiked brown hair. They reminisced about some of the funnier things that have happened during their friendship, like the time Smoltz, wearing his complete Braves uniform, showed up at Foxworthy's house at 11 p.m. to play an MLB video. "I kept praying, 'Just let him get pulled over on the way home,'" said Foxworthy.

And there was the first time they went bowling together.

"He had bragged about being a great bowler," said Smoltz.

"We walked into the bowling alley, and it was like Elvis had walked into Graceland," recalled Foxworthy. "I was signing beer cans as fast as I could!"

Johnson interjected, "And now we've all gotten a taste of what it's like when these two go out and paint the town beige," which was his cue to introduce a video of Foxworthy and Smoltz engaged in some "friendly" competition at Smoltz's house.

The video included a fishing contest during which Foxworthy caught 32 fish, and Smoltz hooked his jacket... Then there was a Ping Pong game in which Foxworthy was casually seated at one end of the table while Smoltz was running ragged at the other end... Score: Foxworthy 21-2, Smoltz-rug burns.

The video continued with a video game competition of Scrabble, golf, and one-on-one basketball in which Smoltz attempted to psych out Foxworthy by wearing his junior high school basketball warmups. It didn't work.

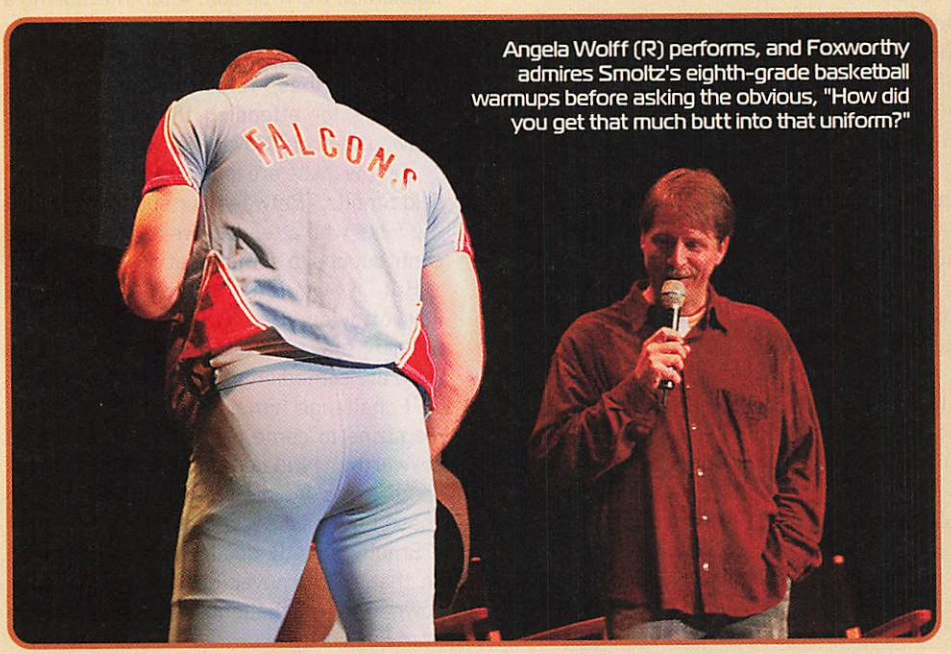
Smoltz even offered to give Foxworthy $1 million if he made an "impossible" behind-the-backboard shot from the patio of the house. Naturally, Foxworthy made the shot!

In the end, Foxworthy trounced Smoltz in every game, including the DVD version of "Are

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Smoltz greets (L-R) Jeff Francoeur, Tom Glavine and Kathryn Darden duringthe private reception at his home that preceded the main event.

CLAYTON CAMERACRAFT PHOTOGRAPHY



Angela Wolff (R) performs, and Foxworthy admires Smoltz's eighth-grade basketball warmups before asking the obvious, "How did you get that much butt into that uniform?"

PHOTOS: CLAYTON CAMERACRAFT PHOTOGRAPHY

CASEY KOTCHMAN

COMPETITION IS WHAT KEEPS ME MOTIVATED

I AM DEFINITELY HAPPY to be an Atlanta Brave. I'm really looking forward to getting to spring training and helping our team win next season.

I missed 11 days during August to be with my mom, Sarah, when she was in the hospital. She's doing much better. She's out of the hospital and is resting. She does what she's able to do and is taking it a day at a time.

When I got back from the bereavement leave, I felt I was able to concentrate on my game. I knew my mom was in good hands, and she obviously wanted me to be with my team.

We had always heard that the Braves were a first-class organization, and we saw how supportive they were during that time. I really appreciated that support.

I didn't feel pressure when I got back, because I don't view playing baseball as pressure. Playing baseball is fun. Dodging bullets or not knowing where your next meal is coming from, that's pressure.

I try not to analyze performances too much. There are so many variables that contribute to success in baseball. Just being a fraction of an inch off, one way or another, determines whether or not you'll get a hit. I can't control some of those variables.

The motivation for me every day is the competition. You play games to win. If you put everything into the moment, you won't have any regrets.

My approach to preparing for the next season has pretty much stayed the same. I take about two weeks off right after the season. I try to chill out as much as possible, but I have a hard time sitting still. I'll want to relax, but end up stretching or doing light exercises in front of the TV. I feel like I'm wasting time if I'm sitting still.

> "I'VE ALREADY GOT THE ITCH TO START PLAYING AGAIN... I HATE TO WASTE TIME. I'M READY TO GET GOING."

After taking those first couple of weeks off, I started working out with the trainer I've used for the past 10 years. He makes an evaluation on my overall body composition with regard to strength and proportion, and then makes recommendations on what we need to work on in the areas that are functional for baseball.

I'll work out with my trainer three to four days a week. I generally start with 20 minutes of cardiovascular work, whether it's biking, running or ladder drills. Then while I'm still loose, we'll work on upper body and lower body, going back and forth until I get a whole body workout, and end up with a light jog.

The whole workout is a solid three to four hours. I'll do other smaller things on my own on the days I don't work out with the trainer.

Around mid-November, I started swinging. I take dry swings, swings off a tee, and I swing from both sides, right and left, because I want to work the oblique muscles on both sides, even though during the season I hit and throw from the left side.

I'm fortunate that my dad, Tom (a manager in the Angels farm system), still handles throwing batting practice for me. We go to the University of Tampa or to my old high school.

It's an understatement to say that my family and I are excited about spring training at Disney in Orlando! I've gone to spring training every year in Arizona, and it's definitely going to be a treat to be just two hours from my home (St. Petersburg).

I've already got the itch to start playing again. I remember hearing a speaker in the minor leagues say once, "You can't buy back time." That made a lot of sense to me, and it stuck with me. I hate to waste time. I'm ready to get going.

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

You Smarter Than A Fifth-Grader," the Fox network game show hosted by Foxworthy.

Following the video, Johnson moderated a brief question-and-answer session with Foxworthy and Smoltz. The first question came from Governor Perdue who, like Smoltz, is bald. The governor asked Smoltz, who was still wearing his visor/hairpiece, if he could get a referral to the Hair Club for Men! Perdue wisely decided to leave the comedy to the professionals. He switched gears and complimented Foxworthy and Smoltz for their generosity to the community.

Next, a youngster in the crowd asked Smoltz, "Whether or not you paid Mr. Foxworthy the $1 million (for making the basketball shot)?"

As the audience laughed, Smoltz answered, "In Hollywood, a lot of things are make-believe so, no, I didn't give him the million dollars."

Smoltz attempted to warm up the crowd with a couple of his favorite - meaning lamest - jokes, but he deferred to Foxworthy who added, "You folks need to pray fervently that John's shoulder heals!"

Though he rarely performs his stand-up act anymore, Foxworthy did over an hour of hilarious material about the follies and foibles of human nature and family dysfunction, with a little of his trademark redneck humor thrown in for good measure.

At the conclusion of Foxworthy's performance, Smoltz continued to show tremendous self-deprecating humor by bounding onto the stage in his junior high basketball warmup suit. After introducing a video of outtakes from the Smoltz/Foxworthy competition, he left the stage to change clothes, returning to thank the audience for attending the event and for braving the cold November night.

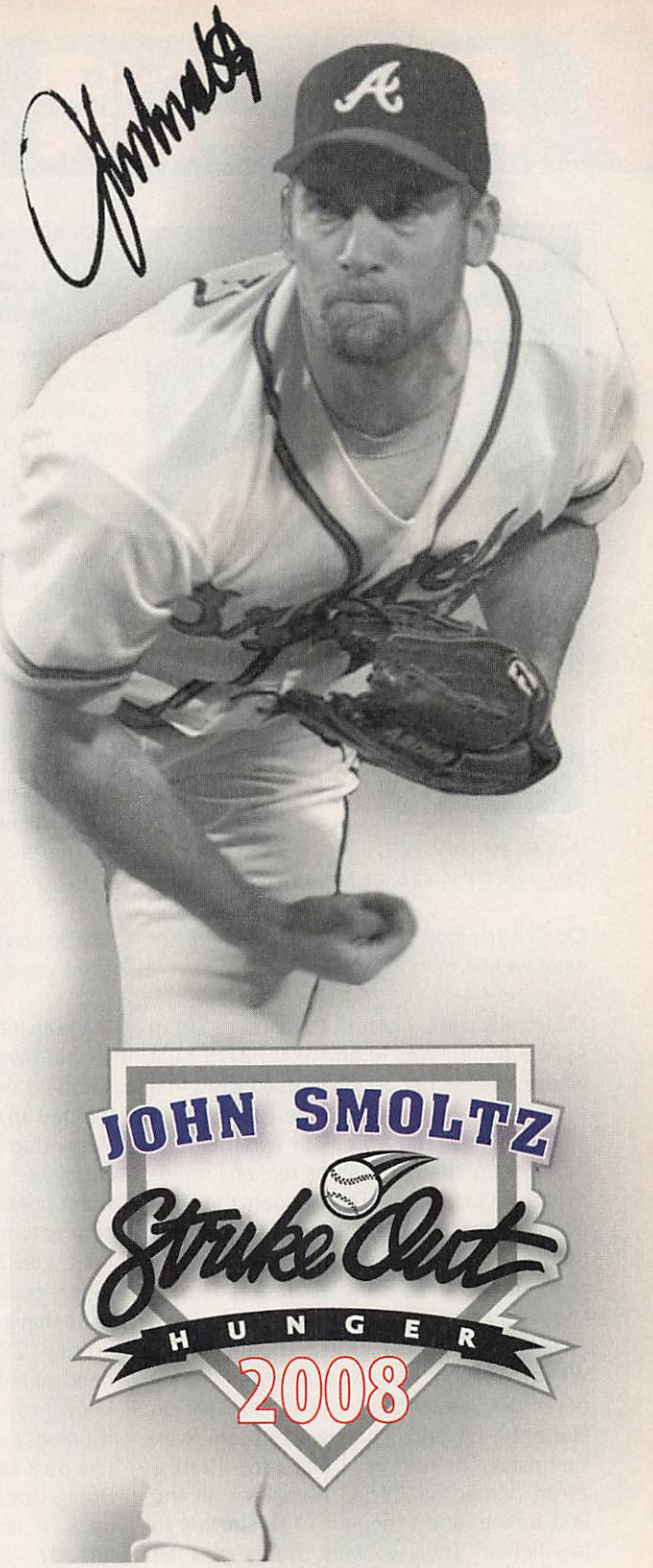
"I know these are tough times financially," said Smoltz. "Between our sponsors and all the folks who attended, we're able to make contributions to some great charities."

But it wouldn't be an evening of Foxworthy and Smoltz without more competition, and thus a challenge was issued from the comedian to the pitcher.

"I challenge him right here in ChopTalk magazine to come on 'Fifth Grader,'" said Foxworthy. "I will personally match whatever he earns for his charity, but I'll bet he doesn't get past second grade."

Smoltz initially declined, but stay tuned on that... He's never been known to back down from a challenge - especially one from Foxworthy.

Strike Out Hunger!



SEND IN YOUR DONATION TODAY.

Atlanta Braves pitcher John Smoltz knows it's important to build a better community. That's why John is helping the Atlanta Community Food Bank strike out hunger. We need your help too! You can help Georgians in need by joining John's Strike Out Hunger team. John is donating $200 to the Food Bank for every strikeout this season. And you can receive a sports item autographed by John for every pledge YOU make. As a special thank you for your donation and support, each paid pledge will receive a gift based on the pledge levels shown below. All gifts are tax deductible less the retail value of the item(s) received. All gifts will be autographed by John Smoltz.

Yes!

I will pledge $_____

Signed Gear		Total
Limited Edition Photograph	$ 25___	$___
Baseball Cap	$ 75___	$___
Baseball	$ 150___	$___
Official Bat	$ 400___	$___
Official Glove	$ 500___	$___
Official Smoltz Braves Jersey	$1000___	$___
All items are	$2150___	$___

Name:_____

Address:_____

City:_____ State:_____ Zip:_____

Phone:_____

The Strike Out Hunger season begins with the Braves opening home game and ends with the final regular season home game.
All items based on availability and will be sent to you at the close of the Braves season and upon receipt of payment.

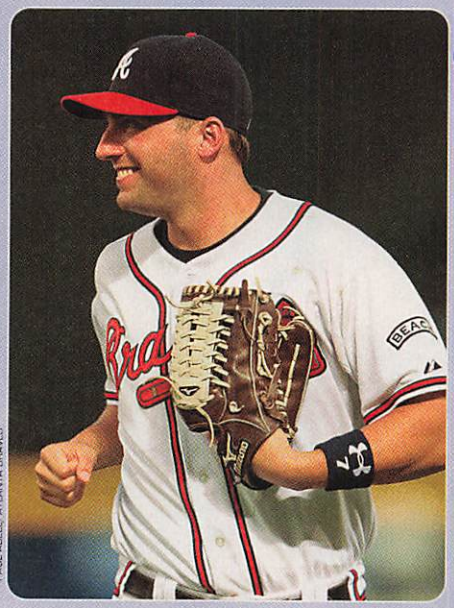
For more information call 404-892-FEED ext.1246. Or visit ACFB.org
Pledge forms should be mailed to Atlanta Community Food Bank, 732 Joseph E. Lowery Blvd. NW, Atlanta, GA 30318-6628
Please make checks payable to Atlanta Community Food Bank.

ATLANTA COMMUNITY FOOD BANK

Nourishing stronger communities.

PLAYING PEPPER

JEFF FRANCOEUR



PAUL ABELL/ATLANTA BRAVES

After hitting .286 in September, Francoeur has set his sights on hitting .270 to .280 with 25-30 home runs next season.

INTERVIEW
BY PATTY RASMUSSEN

Q: Can you look at last season and pinpoint what went wrong for you?

A: I really can't. I got off to a great start in April. I think I was hitting .280 (.277), right where I needed to be. I had good RBIs that month (18). In the past, when I'd go in a slump, it would be a week or two and then I'd get out of them. For some reason I couldn't get out of this one. Then it got to the point where it became mental, and I started listening to everybody in the world. For the previous two and a half years I was so lucky, I got every big hit. I was known as the clutch guy. All of a sudden, I just couldn't do it. Where I thought it would turn around and it never did, was when we went to Chicago (June 10-12) and I got two hits off Ryan Dempster. The next day I was 2-for-5 with a 2-run homer off Carlos Zambrano in the first inning, and I thought, "I'm starting to feel better." Then we went to Anaheim the next day, and my first at-bat, I got a double down the line against John Garland, I got a single the next one, I got a walk, and I popped up. I was 2-for-3 and thinking I'm going to start breaking out. And it went the opposite direction. I stunk in Texas. I had one hit in the three-game series.

Q: Do you have any doubts about your ability to get back on track?

A: I haven't lost any confidence in myself to do what I know I can do. I think what hurts me a little bit is hearing some of the fans give up on me so easily. I mean, I'm 24 years old! It's not like I'm 34 and this is some pattern. It was a season, four months really, because in September I had an okay month (.286). Half the struggles were never dealing with having been sent back to Double A, not knowing how to deal with it. I got frustrated. Then I got mad. There were a lot of emotions thrown in there. It didn't help that we were just getting our butts kicked. But finishing the way I did, getting 71 RBIs, makes me look forward to the spring. I can't wait to show people it was a fluke, a one-year thing. I have to learn to be a different kind of hitter.

Q: Do you mean that opposing pitchers figured you out?

A: Yeah, I think they've figured me out a little bit. I wasn't hitting anything, and I sure wasn't thinking about home runs. I just wanted any kind of hit to get my average up. I was dug in such a hole. I'm approaching this year to do some things to get in the most powerful position I can. My goal next year is to hit .270-.280 and get 25-30 home runs, consistently. I don't need to be a .330 hitter, because that's not who I am. I want to be that guy every year that will do that, hit around .280, hit 30 home runs, and play good defense. That's the kind of player I know I can be. When I head back to spring training, I'm not even going to think about this past season. I feel really confident that Bobby Cox and Frank Wren believe I'll come back. If not, they would have traded me already.

Q: Is it a big deal for you to know that they have that confidence in you?

A: I don't think I ever really gave them a reason not to have that level of confidence in me, because they know I'm going to work hard to get back where I need to be. Anyone who knows me, knows that I'm not just going to sit back and not do anything. The one thing I can look back on and be proud of is that I worked my butt off. If people followed me around, day after day, they would have seen me getting in there early, watching film, hitting in the cages, playing the game, coming home trying to figure out stuff. (The slump) bothered the heck out of me.

Q: Do you think you made mistakes in your preparation for the 2008 season that led to your slump?

A: Absolutely. I look back and know that I did everything with good intentions in terms of trying to gain weight, get stronger. But I'm not a Carlos Lee type hitter. All my home runs are usually line drive shots. That's what I'm going to get back to doing. Right now I'm at 222 pounds. I want to go to spring training weighing between 215 to 220 pounds. I think it will enable my bat to be quick again. Last year, my pull was about as slow as could be. You could get anything past me. My timing was off on both sliders and fastballs, and it was because of the bulk. This past year, I was 238 going into spring training, and I considered myself fat. I felt big and strong, but I could tell right away when I started running that it was different. I didn't say anything in spring, but it scared me a little bit when I was running and could feel my legs not coming under me. The speed was missing. To be honest, it affected my defense for a little while. I wasn't getting to balls that I usually should. I didn't start hitting last (off) season until February 1. I took a different approach, and it was the wrong approach for everything.

Q: What are you changing? How are you preparing for next season?

A: I'm doing more baseball-related stuff. The last week of October, I started running. In mid-November, I'm going over to Andruw Jones' batting cage to start hitting. I'm going to hit and throw a lot more. As far as endurance stuff, I'm doing long running. I have a guy who's going to stretch me three days a week for an hour. He's coming to my house, because I don't really want to go to yoga classes! Last year, I don't think I ever stretched. I was bigger, but my muscles were tight. Phil Falco (strength and conditioning coach) took measurements of our

body fat before the end of the season and told us what (measurement/weight) he wanted us to be at when we came to spring training. This was something new. I was at something like 15 percent body fat, and I want to come in at 12 percent. Mentally, I want to go into spring training next year to where it's like I was in '04 and '05 when I was trying to make the team. Even though I know I'm the starting rightfielder, I just want to have that mental attitude.

Q: Are you changing your diet?

> **"NO ONE IS LOOKING FORWARD TO THE START OF SPRING TRAINING MORE THAN I AM, BECAUSE I AM READY TO GO OUT AND PROVE THAT I CAN DO IT."**

A: We're being a lot more conscious of eating at home. I eat a couple of salads a day now. I realized that I can't go out and eat and drink the way I used to, because I'll put on weight. I could do whatever I wanted when I was 21 years old. The better you eat, the better you feel. I have a lot more energy.

Q: What's the daily routine like?

A: I'm working out in the afternoon at two different places, with Rob Livingstone, the former strength coach at the University of Georgia, and then a little bit of running with Chip Smith at the place I used last year. I'm going to lift and run, but I'm not going to get nuts about it. I want to be baseball ready at spring training. I'm really going to work on hitting, throwing and running. I want to work on getting my power back and getting myself into a powerful hitting position that's going to be successful. This year, for two or three months, I changed my stance every other day.

Q: What was it like emotionally to go through such a dismal season in such a public way, with everyone watching and commenting on it? How did you keep your spirits up?

A: A couple of things, my relationship with the good Lord. When I first came up to the big leagues, I used to be a guy who'd slam my helmet and stuff like that. Now that's not who I am. It does nothing for me. Secondly, having someone to come home to, my wife, Catie, really helped. If I had had to come home by myself, I would have TiVo'd the games and watched them to try to figure stuff out. Instead, I'd come home and the first thing we'd do is watch a movie, talk about something else other than baseball. She'd try to take my mind off what I was going through. She was the rock for me for those three or four months. There finally came a point in mid-August where I was fed up with being miserable. I decided that whether I was playing good or not, I wasn't going to come home like that. I'd put a smile on my face and do the best I could. It was tough to do, and there were times I know that I hid it in the clubhouse. But I can truly say that the last month of the season was some of the most fun playing baseball.

Q: Are you wearing the contact lens? Did that help?

A: I'm not going to use it. I don't wear contacts normally, never have. I put them in for a while and didn't like them. I've had some eye trouble from getting hit (below the eye with a ball in 2004), and sometimes I think my eye is messed up. But every time I get them tested, I'm 20/20! There's no excuse there. As the season went on, I think everyone wanted there to be an excuse as to why I was doing so badly. My dad wanted me to get my eyes tested, but I just came to the conclusion, like I told my dad, I just flat out stunk.

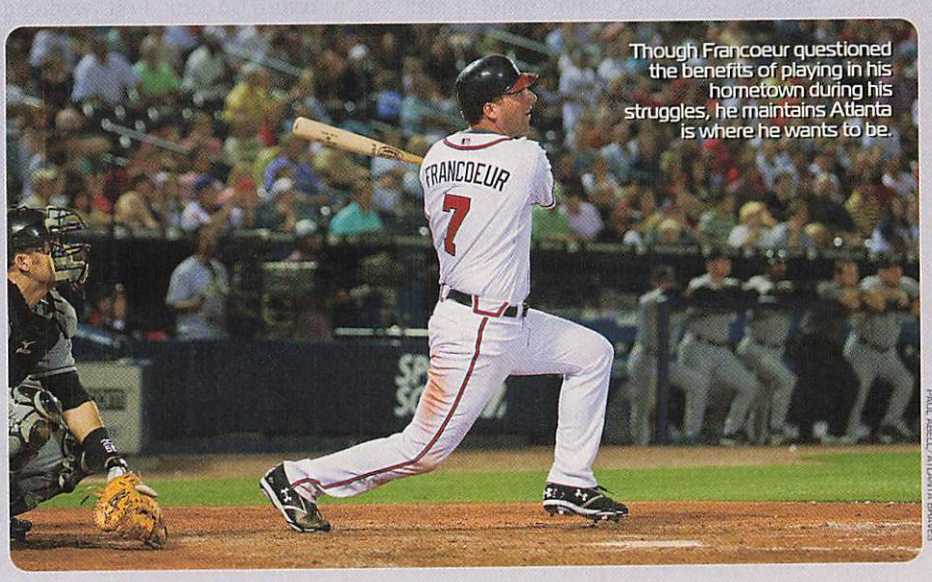
Q: It sounds as though you were able to deal with it better than people around you.

A: Absolutely. It's so funny because you see a lot of fans and the people who want to try to fix it. Suddenly everyone is a hitting coach, and everyone has the answers. But it's not easy, especially when you have no confidence in yourself. It gets 10 times worse. No one was happier to see the season end than me... but no one is looking forward to the start of spring training more than I am, because I am ready to go out and prove that I can do it. I want to prove that I'm going to do everything I can to help this team, bat fourth, fifth, or sixth and be a run-producer.

Q: What will you take away from your experience this year that will help you in the future?

A: Perspective. It's battling through this stuff that's going to make me a better ballplayer. I think that 10 to 11 years from now, when I look back on this past season, hopefully I'll say that was the year I became a different, better ballplayer. This past season will help me become a better leader, because I'll have a story to tell. When I'm down the road and young players around me are going up and down, I can say, "Listen, I only did it for three

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



Though Francoeur questioned the benefits of playing in his hometown during his struggles, he maintains Atlanta is where he wants to be.

PAUL ABELL/ ATLANTA BRAVES

days, but for a guy that had been in the big leagues for three years, being sent to Mississippi was an embarrassing three days." It was a different kind of send down, because they weren't bringing someone up. They didn't know what to do with me. And that's what was embarrassing to me.

Q: Was that the lowest point for you?

A: Yeah, absolutely. I'll tell you who was great - Brian McCann. You talk about a best friend and a guy that's always been there. He was great throughout the whole season. It was tough, because he had such a great year and he was seeing me struggle so badly. I remember calling him, I think, the second night I was in Mississippi. We went into a 12- or 13-inning game, and in the 11th inning, there was nobody at the game and I was out there in right field saying, "What am I doing here?" He'd send text messages and remind me that I'd be back soon. He was great with the jokes when I rejoined the team.

Q: What was it like when you got back with the team? Did it seem strange?

A: Well, it was great to get back, but I'm not going to lie to you. For the first week or so, it was awkward, not with the guys on the team but with the front office. Everybody knows I didn't agree with what happened.

Q: Being sent down really hadn't occurred to you?

A: No, because I thought what other options were there at that point. If we had someone hitting the heck out of the ball at Triple A, sure... but there wasn't. I felt that because the Phillies had made a similar move with Brett Myers a few days before that, it all of a sudden became okay for another team to do it. I look back and ask, "What did those three days in the minor leagues do for me?"

Q: How do you answer that?

A: That's what I'm saying: Nothing. I will tell you this - I had a blast with the guys down there. I had fun hanging out with them. But being sent down was in the back of my mind the rest of the season. It wore off, but it was there for a good month or so.

Q: What was the biggest thing you learned about yourself this season?

A: You can't try to please everybody. Catie's gotten on me for years about that, trying to be a people-pleaser. I learned that I have to say "No," or at least "Not right now." When you start getting booed and you hear people making comments, you have to realize that not everyone is going to like you. One of the coolest things I remember about the day I met President George W. Bush was when he told us that he used to lose sleep about what people were saying and writing about him. He was getting 3 or 4 hours of sleep each night, but that changed because he said, "I have great people around me, regardless of what other people think." I felt the same way. Between my wife, my family, my coaches and teammates, I have the best group of people around me, and that was all I really needed.

> "THERE WERE NIGHTS WHEN I CRIED MYSELF TO SLEEP WITH HER, BECAUSE I WAS SO FRUSTRATED AND WANTING TO DO GOOD."

Q: It was your first year of marriage and you went through some tough times right off the bat.

A: Catie and I were looking forward to our first year of marriage, but it was a tough year. Catie went through a lot stuff, nights of me coming home and being distant from her for a time. On our first wedding anniversary (Nov. 3), we went out to dinner and talked and laughed about things, like the night I came home crying. I can be honest. There were nights when I cried myself to sleep with her, because I was so frustrated and wanting to do good.

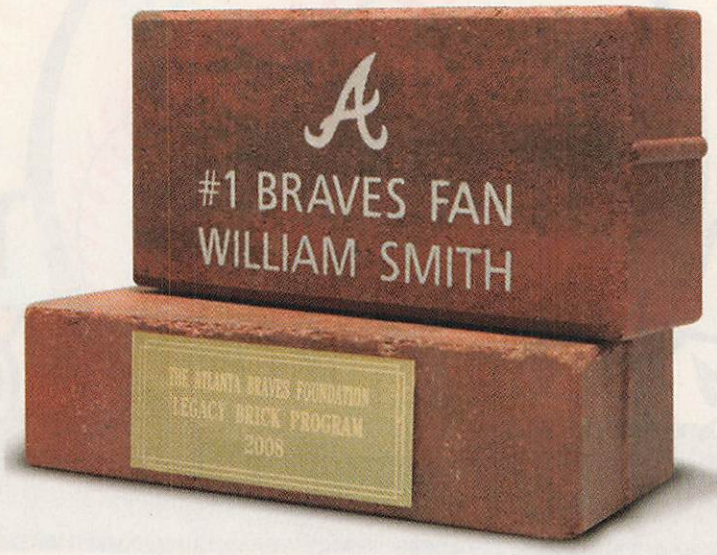
Q: Was playing in your hometown more of a disadvantage?

A: There were times when I said, "I don't want to play here in Atlanta anymore. I want to go somewhere else where I'm not a hometown guy and I can just play and not try to please everybody." But I love playing here, of course, and there's no other place I really want to play for a long time. Pat Burrell (Phillies outfielder) was telling me that the first year after signing that 6-year, $50 million contract, he hit .209. He said, "You want to talk about hitting .209 in Atlanta? Try hitting .209 in Philadelphia!" I couldn't imagine that. Look, I heard boos. I heard people ripping me. A couple of radio stations, people I know, saying stuff about me. I knew that at the end of the day, I was still going to be myself, still going to be upbeat. I see people out and about and they'll ask, "Are you okay?" and I say, "Yeah! I'm doing fine! I'm not dying!" The only thing that was going to help me was to get this season over with, enjoy some time off, work hard, and come back next year ready to go. A guy I've gotten to know quite a bit the last two or three years is Lance Berkman (Houston Astros first baseman). He called me up a couple of times this year to check on me. When we were in Houston for the final series, he told me that four years ago, he had an awful year where he hit .255 or .260, and the next year, he told me, he arrived at spring training and from the first day felt great and it continued the whole season. He said, "Was there any difference from the last year to the following year? No, something just had to be off." That's how I felt this year. Something was off, and I couldn't fix it. I put it down as a fluke and everyone has one of those years.

Q: What was the best advice you received, and who gave it to you?

A: The best advice probably came from Catie, mainly because she was here every night with me. She reminded me that at the end of the day, I had a wife and three dogs who love me, a loving family, all the friends I could ask for and a God who cares for me to play for Him. Prepare the best you can and play the best you can, and I think that's why finally, in that last month and a half, I became so happy and loved playing the game. I enjoyed that last month and a half more than any other time in the big leagues or the minor leagues, because I was so relaxed and at peace. I was over the fact that I was being booed. I laughed about it. It was funny how I did better.

GIVE A LASTING MEMORY THIS HOLIDAY SEASON!



Now your favorite fans can become a part of Braves' history, just in time for the holidays, with a personalized brick at the entrance of Turner Field. Each gift also includes a complimentary replica brick to display at home.

Call 1.877.ABF.BRIX or visit braves.com/bricks

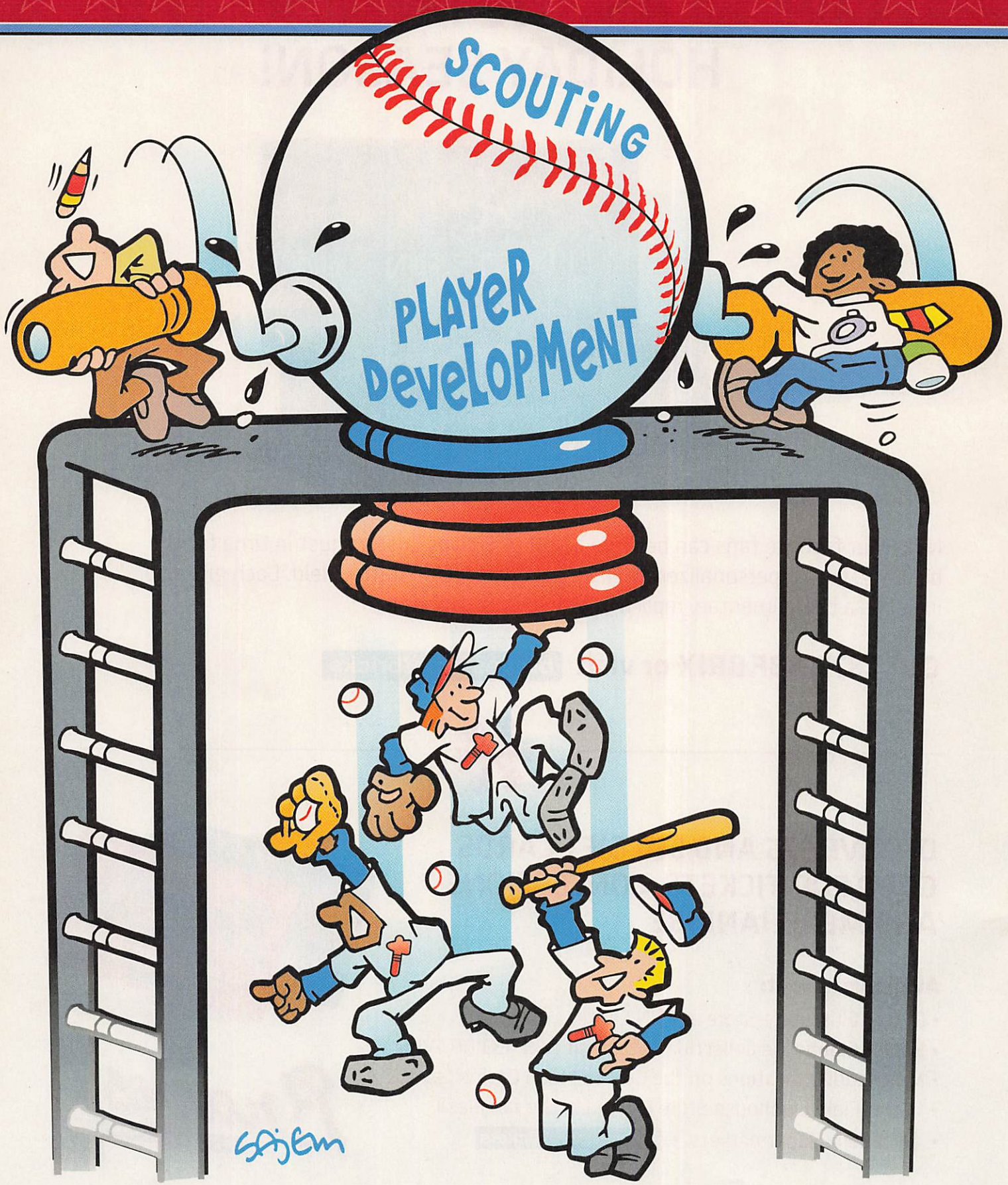
OR GIVE $25 AND $50 GIFT CARDS GOOD FOR TICKETS, CONCESSIONS AND MERCHANDISE

Available now at:

- Braves Clubhouse Store at CNN Center
- Braves Clubhouse Collection Catalog at 800.433.BRAVES
- Merchandise locations on the Golden Moon Casino Level
- Turner Field Clubhouse Store located in the fan plaza
- Publix Supermarkets • braves.com/tickets

Braves

© 2008, Atlanta National League Baseball Club, Inc. All rights reserved. ™ The Braves script and tomahawk are trademarks of the Atlanta National League Baseball Club, Inc. All rights reserved.


SCOUTING
PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

Kurt Kemp (L), director of player development, and Jose Martinez, assistant director of international scouting, are two of the key people responsible for keeping the flow of prospects moving toward Atlanta.

BILL SETLIFF

WELL-OILED MACHINE

Finding, Signing and Developing Talent the "Braves Way" Is a Sophisticated, Never-Ending, Worldwide Challenge For Almaraz, Clark, Kemp & Co.

BY JON COOPER

The Atlanta Braves were a well-oiled winning machine from 1991 through 2005, capturing an unprecedented 14 consecutive division titles, five National League pennants and the 1995 World Series championship. Players like Tom Glavine, Steve Avery, David Justice, Ron Gant, Mark Lemke, Chipper Jones, Andruw Jones, Jeff Francoeur, Brian McCann and so many others found their way from various areas of the country – even the world – to Atlanta.

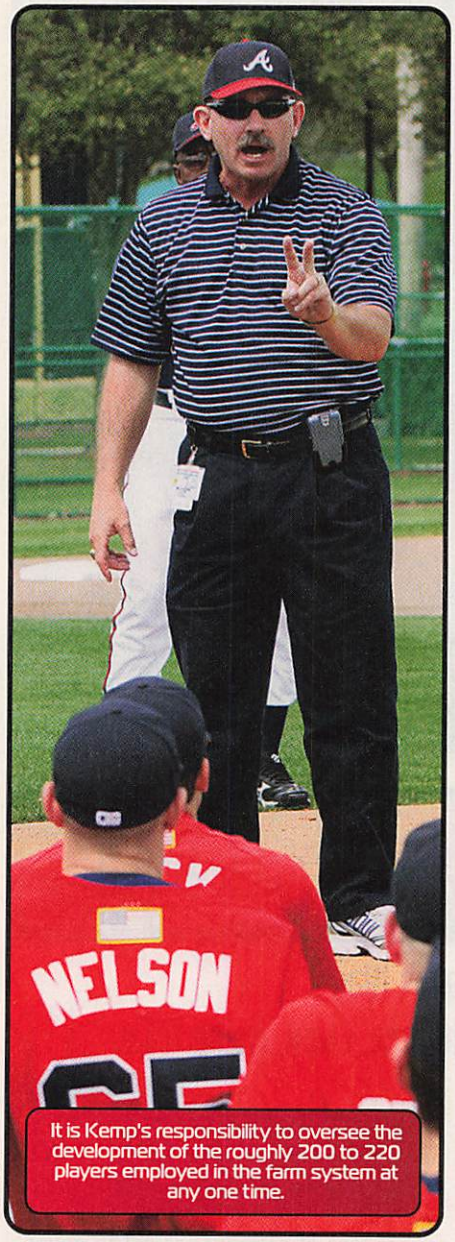
How they got to Atlanta, via the team's scouting and player development departments, in Braves circles, is simply referred to as the "Braves Way," and it has resulted in the team being named Organization of the Year in 1991, 1996 and 2005 by Baseball America and in 1996 by USA Today.

The ability to re-stock was most recently - and most dramatically - illustrated in 2005, when 18 players — 12 of them making their major league debuts — were called up from Double-A and Triple-A affiliates to help the Braves finish first for the 14th straight season - a pro sports record. In fact, the Braves' minor league system is still considered one of the deepest in baseball, and its scouting and player development departments are still exemplary even though the Braves have not reached the post-season in three years.

"The 'Braves Way' is the way we choose to do things," said director of player development Kurt Kemp, who started with the organization in 1998 as an area scout and worked his way up from cross checker (supervisor of regional scouts) to national cross checker to his current position, which he's held since 2006.

"That is the commitment that our scouts have, the unyielding commitment that they have to find not just talented players, but kids they know are going to come in and have the greatest chance of success," Kemp said. "So, it all fits together. It's not individual components that stand by themselves. We all interact together as these kids move through the process."

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



It is Kemp's responsibility to oversee the development of the roughly 200 to 220 players employed in the farm system at any one time.

BILL SETLIFF

"We take the philosophy that we've had ever since I got here [in 1989], that is John Schuerholz's approach, and that is the better prepared, the harder we work, the luckier we get," added Roy Clark, director of scouting, who has been in his current position since 1998 after working as a scout in the Cleveland Indians' and Seattle Mariners' organizations. "It is an everyday, 12-months-a-year job. Our goal is to fill our system up with projects so Kurt Kemp and his staff in player development can do their jobs... so [Frank Wren] and [Bobby Cox] can do their jobs.

"We don't lower our standards on and off the field," he continued. "We know what we're looking for and turn it over to what we think is the best player development staff in baseball. If they (players) stay healthy, we think that we should have a productive major leaguer."

The pursuit of the "Braves Way" keeps everyone, from top to bottom, constantly on the move. ChopTalk reached Kemp after he had just returned from the Arizona Fall League, where he was observing seven different Braves prospects. Clark was on his way to the airport for a scouting mission to the West Coast, and Johnny Almaraz, director of international scouting and operations, talked to us during a 20-minute break between games in Mexico.

> "WE TAKE THE PHILOSOPHY THAT WE'VE HAD EVER SINCE I GOT HERE [IN 1989], THAT IS JOHN SCHUERHOLZ'S APPROACH, AND THAT IS THE BETTER PREPARED, THE HARDER WE WORK, THE LUCKIER WE GET. – ROY CLARK, DIRECTOR OF SCOUTING"

Clark's scouting staff starts with 16 area supervisors, each of whom is given a chunk of territory, along with four professional scouts and six part-time scouts. They report to four regional cross checkers, who report to two national cross checkers, who, in turn report to Clark. Every scout's every assignment is crucial.

"We follow up on every lead," said Clark. "You make contacts, you have tryout camps, you go to ballgames. You never know where they're going to come from.

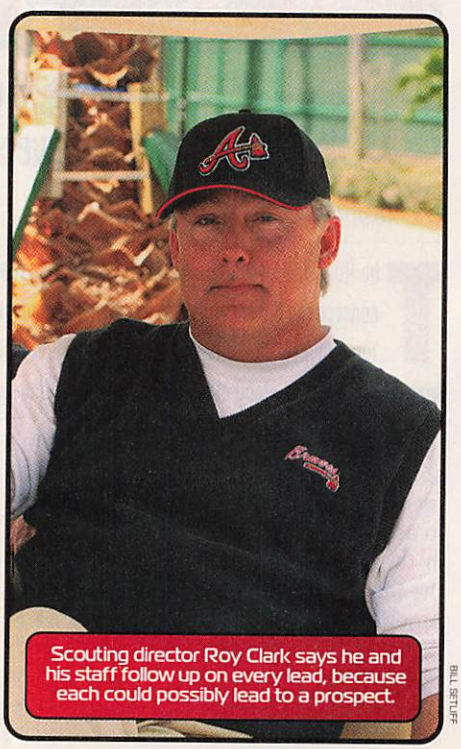
"I remember one year when I was in Latin America, we were having a workout in the Dominican Republic and some guy comes up to me and said, 'Hey, we've got somebody here better than him.' So I said, 'Bring him on.' He brought him in, we worked him out, and sure enough, he was better. His name was Willy Aybar. The other guy's name I forget, but that happens all the time. When we go to ballgames, we try to scout the whole game, not just one particular person."

Such an impression isn't quickly forgotten, and it explains why the Braves insisted on getting Aybar along with reliever Danys Baez in the July 28, 2006, trade of one-time highly regarded Braves prospect Wilson Betemit to the Dodgers.

If it sounds like Clark and his domestic scouting staff have a lot of ground to cover, consider the workload of Almaraz and his staff.

With the rest of the world as hunting ground, Almaraz & Co. obviously have an even larger field to cover. Almaraz knows the territory, having spent 16 years establishing the Cincinnati Reds' presence in Latin America, including developing academies in the Dominican Republic and Venezuela before being hired by the Braves in December 2006. He gives a lot of weight to the local area scouts when he makes his scouting trips.

"The [area scouts have] seen a guy 20 or 30 times for three, four, five years and they know him better than I do," he said. "Our job is to compare tools and make sure that we're getting the kid with the best ability. That and having area scouts' opinions is how



Scouting director Roy Clark says he and his staff follow up on every lead, because each could possibly lead to a prospect.

BILL SETLIFF

we try to make the best decision possible."

Constant communication is paramount, even if it's not easy between time zones.

"I talk to the guys in Latin America almost every single day," said Almaraz. "I probably talk to [Eastern Rim coordinator] Phil Dale two or three times a week. We're in communication every single day in North America and every other day, so to speak, in the other parts of the world, because of time differences. Sometimes you just can't coordinate because they're a day ahead, and their day is our night and vice versa."

"Johnny and I speak frequently, but Kurt and I speak daily," agreed Clark, who had been Kemp's colleague in scouting for nine years. "I let him know exactly what we're doing, who we're looking at."

With so much ground to cover and the race to be first always on, staying on top of the latest developments in technology is almost as important as staying on top of the prospects.

"I scouted an area for 11 years and we used to have to stop at pay phones and call ahead. If you get a busy signal, then you had to stop at the next pay phone and see if it was raining, this, that or the other," recalled Clark. "So, the cell phone has been huge. The internet has been huge. It is our responsibility as a scouting department to stay on top of things electronically.

"We have a never-changing philosophy: To win championships at the major league level through strong scouting and player development," he added. "That's our philosophy, but we've got an ever-changing methodology. Fortunately, I've got a great staff of guys that understand that. I'm just an old country boy, but I've learned how to do the computer and text messaging and all that. But in the end, you've got to be able to scout."

Once prospects are scouted, drafted (if necessary), and signed, they become the responsibility of Kemp and player development. The scouting department starts all over, trying to find the next great prospects, because there are 200 to 220 slots to fill at San Francisco de Macoris (Dominican rookie); Orlando, Fla. (rookie Gulf Coast League); Danville, Va. (advanced rookie Appalachian League); Rome, Ga. (A South Atlantic League); Myrtle Beach, S.C. (advanced A Carolina League); Mississippi (AA Southern League); and, starting in 2009, Gwinnett (AAA International League).

During the off-season, it's Kemp's responsibility to keep all the locations stocked with talent, and it becomes one of the more challenging and unpredictable aspects of his job once the season begins, as evidenced by the 2008 season.

"When you looked on the disabled list in my office, you saw [John] Smoltz and Glavine and [Peter] Moylan and [Rafael] Soriano, all these guys that ended up being out. Those spots had to be filled on the major league side," Kemp said. "Jorge Campillo, [Charlie] Morton, [Jo-Jo] Reyes, Vladimir Nunez, all of those guys, started out with our Triple-A team, and at some point, were called to duty with the major league club because of necessity. It's not like we have an unlimited supply of guys to just keep plugging into in the minors, either. But we adjust."

Kemp also advises GM Frank Wren on which prospects should be included if the Braves decide to pull the trigger on a prospects-heavy trade, like the one with Texas in 2007 for Mark Teixeira and Ron Mahay that sent Jarrod Saltalamacchia, Elvis Andrus, Matt Harrison, Neftali Perez and Beau Jones to the Rangers.

"My sole job from that standpoint is to give Frank an evaluation of the players in our system so he knows what we have coming up," said Kemp. "Then, ultimately, he makes those decisions based on what he has to do at the major league level. That's maybe the most valuable thing that we can provide to Frank — a good evaluation of the players in our own system to let him do his job to help build our major league club."

In the end, whether it's Kemp's roster equivalent of juggling an apple, a bowling ball and a chainsaw... Almaraz trying to narrow the top prospects at the same position in the Dominican, Asia, Mexico, Panama and Venezuela... or Clark deciding on a draft pick, the one constant is the "Braves Way."

"Each and every one of our scouts wake up every day going to ballparks and trying to find that next diamond in the rough, so to speak," said Clark. "You've got to want to be the best scouting department in baseball. If you have that desire and you have the work ethic and the dedication and the preparation, good things happen."

DIRECTORY

SCOUTING EXECUTIVES

Johnny Almaraz
Director of International Scouting and Operations

ATLANTA BRAVES

In his current role since January 2008, Almaraz is one of the most widely respected talent evaluators in baseball. He's responsible for the Reds' presence in Latin America. Having started in 1991 with Cincinnati, his biggest signings include Adam Dunn and B.J. Ryan.

Roy Clark
Director of Scouting

ATLANTA BRAVES

In his 10th season as director of scouting, Clark was a Braves national supervisor from 1996-99, scouting supervisor for the Southeast in 1995, and an area scout from 1989, when he joined the Braves, through 1994. He started as a Seattle Mariners area coach in 1985.

Jose Martinez
Assistant Director of International Scouting

ATLANTA BRAVES

Martinez has been in baseball since 1960, including a 12-year career as a player in the Pittsburgh Pirates and Kansas City Royals organizations. He then managed in the Royals' system, and was first base coach for eight years with the Chicago Cubs. Martinez came to the Braves from Chicago prior to the 1995 season. From 1979-84, he also won three championships and was manager of the year in 1980, '81 and '82. He's also worked in the Venezuelan Winter Leagues.

Rolando Petit
Assistant Director of Latin American Operations

A member of the Braves organization

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

since 1991, Petit was named Assistant Director of Latin American Operations in January, 2008. He is responsible for all scouting in Venezuela and is active in the Braves Academy. Among his most important signings are Martin Prado and Gregor Blanco. Petit played one season (1988) in the Braves organization.

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT EXECUTIVES

Kurt Kemp
Director of Player Development
Kemp joined the organization in 1998 as an area scout, moved up to West Coast cross checker in 2004, then national cross checker in 2005, and into his current role in August 2006.

Ronnie Richardson
Assistant Director of Player Development
The newest member of the player development department is also the youngest. He was promoted to his current position in September. The 27-year-old Atlanta native joined the Braves in 2004, working in corporate sales and marketing, before moving into baseball operations prior to the 2006 season. He was a four-year starter for the Albany (Ga.) State University baseball team.

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT AND SCOUTING STAFF

John Coppolella Director of Baseball Administration
Raquel Davis Administrative Assistant
Dixie Keller Administrative Assistant
Chris Rice Administrative Assistant

MINOR LEAGUE PERSONNEL

Tommy Shields - Field Coordinator
Kent Willis - Pitching Coordinator
Leon Roberts Hitting Coordinator
Mike Alvarez Roving Instructor (Pitching)
Joe Breeden Roving Instructor (Catching)
Lynn Jones Roving Instructor (Outfield/Baserunning)
Jonathan Schuerholz Roving Instructor (Infield)
Luckie Dacosta Roving Strength and Conditioning Instructor
Matt Saitz Assistant Roving Strength/Conditioning Instructor
Troy Jones Physical Therapist
Justin Clift Equipment Manager

SCOUTING STAFF

Advance Scout
Bobby Wine
National Cross Checkers
Terry Robert Tripp
Jerry Jordan
Regional Cross Checkers
Tom Battista
Paul Faulk
Steve Taylor

AREA SUPERVISORS

Billy Best N.C., S.C., Va.
Brian Bridges Ga., Ala., Northern Fla., Tenn.
Stu Cann Northern Ill., Wisc., Minn., Mich.
Dan Cox S. Calif., Hawaii
Brett Evert Alaska, Ida., Mont., Oregon, Wash., Wy.
Ralph Garr Southeastern Texas
Paul Gibson Conn., Mass., Maine, N.H., N.J., N.Y., Pa., R.I., Vt. Canada
Buddy Hernandez Fla.
Brian Hunter Southern Calif.
Chris Knabenshue Colo., Az., N.M., Utah
Tim Moore Ky., Ind., Ohio, Western Tenn., W.Va.
Don Thomas La., Miss.
Terry Tripp Ark., Iowa, Mo., Neb., N.D., S.D.
Gerald Turner Kan., Okla., Texas

PROFESSIONAL SCOUTS

Harold Cronin
Rod Gilbreath
Lloyd Merritt
John Stewart
Jonathan Story

PART-TIME SCOUTS

Hugh Buchanan Ga./Ala.
Joe Caputo Pa.
Gene Kearns Mid-Atlantic
DeWayne Kitts S.C.
George Martin Fla.
Mike Spiers Southern Calif.
Stan Teem Tenn./Ga.

INTERNATIONAL SUPERVISORS

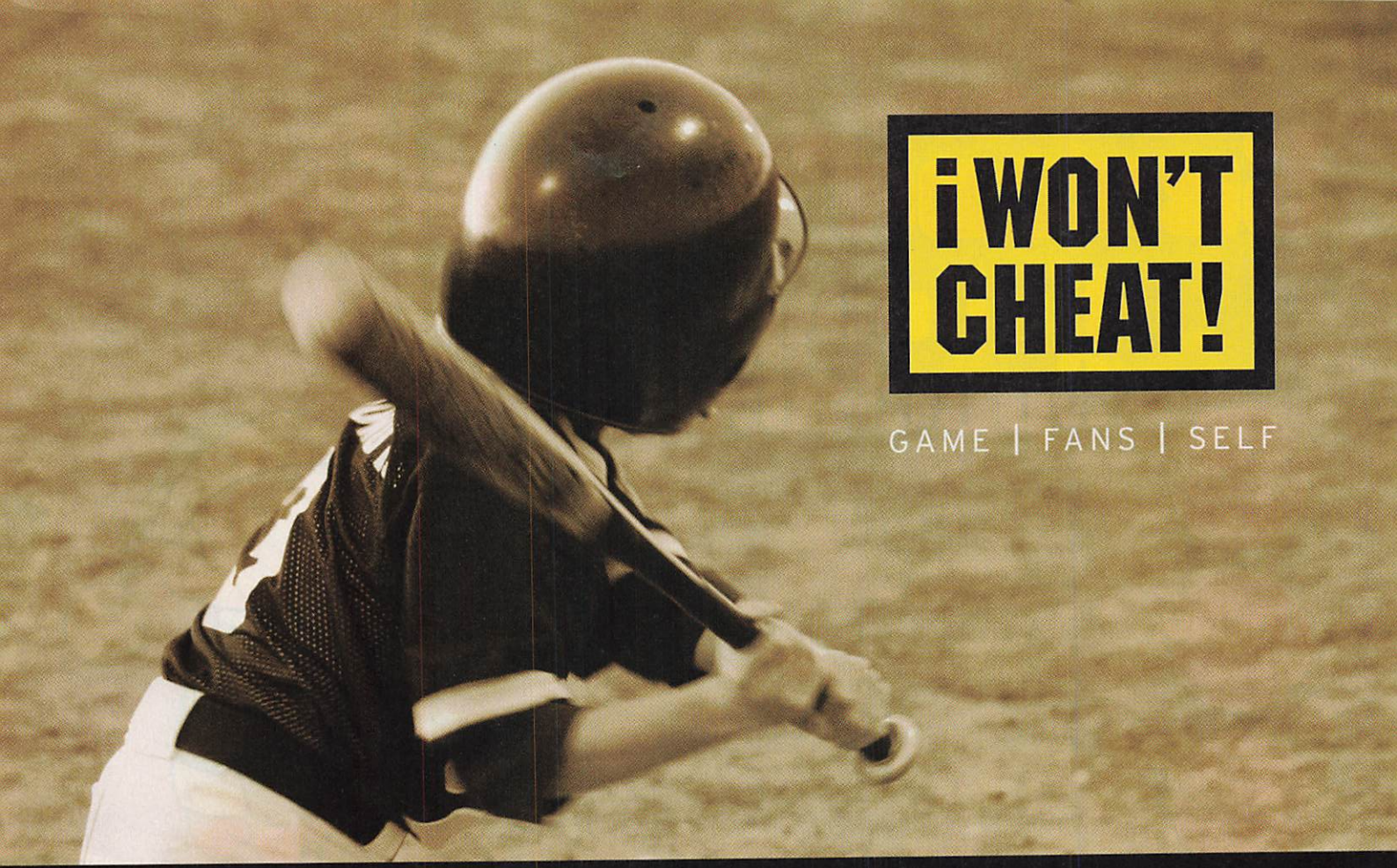
Roberto Aquino Latin American Coordinator
Phil Dale Eastern Rim Coordinator

INTERNATIONAL AREA SUPERVISORS

Luis Ortiz Panama
Hiroyuki Oya Japan
Manuel Samaniego Mexico

INTERNATIONAL PART-TIME SCOUTS

Miguel Alcantara Dominican Republic
Eduardo Becerra Perez Venezuela
Neil Burke Australia
Nehoma Caldera Venezuela
Alberto Cambero Venezuela
Junior Carrion Dominican Republic
Jeremy Chou Taiwan
Jefferson D'Lima Venezuela
Carlos Garcia Colombia
Jose Guzman Dominican Republic
Duk Lee Korea
Johnathan Perez Dominican Republic
Maximo Rombley Dominican Republic
Eduardo Rosario Venezuela
Miguel Theran Colombia
Marvin Throneberry Nicaragua
Carlos Torres Venezuela



I WON'T CHEAT!

GAME | FANS | SELF

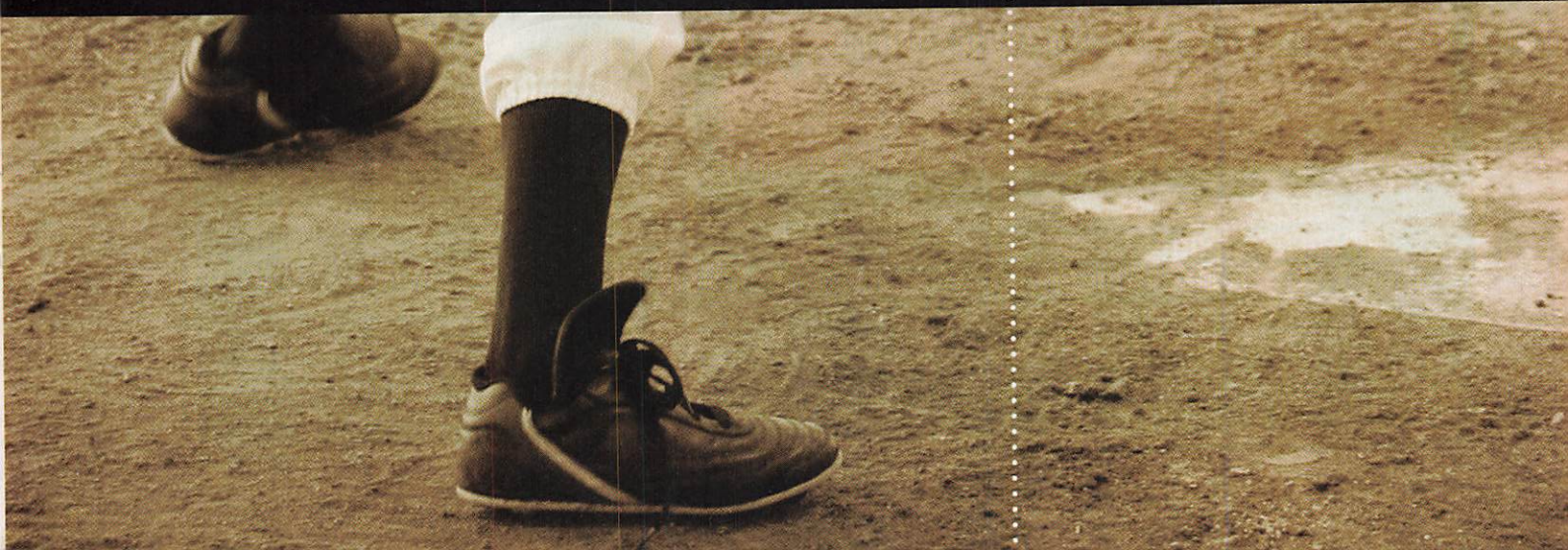
"Youth athletes who feel the pressure to cheat have been damaged the most by the steroid problem. Let's work together to create a drug free atmosphere in sports."

–Dale Murphy

2 TIME NL MVP, ATLANTA BRAVES

FOUNDER OF THE I WON'T CHEAT FOUNDATION

www.iwontcheat.com



ChopTalk

Season's Signings

Holiday Spectacular

Collecting thousands of Braves autographs for you is a lot of work for the ChopTalk elves. In fact, the agent for Santa's helpers threatened to have them all pursue free agency if they had to do it again this year.

Jolly Old Saint Nicholas promptly told the elves he'd put them on waivers if they didn't see that the Best Braves Fans In The World deserve this Holiday Spectacular that has become a ChopTalk tradition.

The elves, who never questioned this in the first place, fired their agent, signed multi-year contracts, and cheerfully went off - cards and Sharpies in hand - to ask the Braves and former Braves to autograph our special collector's cards just for you.

And, once again, you'll also receive a coupon for 10 percent off your next purchase from the Braves Clubhouse Collection Catalog, along with a complimentary autograph* when you subscribe, renew or give a gift subscription.

That's the ChopTalk Holiday Spectacular you - and the elves - have come to expect!

*AUTOGRAPH OFFER GOOD WHILE SUPPLIES LAST

THE BEST BRAVES FANS IN THE WORLD DESERVE AUTOGRAPHS FROM THE BEST BRAVES... AND WE'VE GOT THEM FOR YOU!

BRAVES HALL OF FAMERS

CURRENT BRAVES

MEMBERS OF 1995 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP TEAM

MEMBERS OF 1991 WORST TO FIRST TEAM

AND MANY MORE!

DOZENS OF BRAVES AND FORMER BRAVES ARE EACH SIGNING 50 OF OUR COLORFUL GIFT CARDS SO THAT WE CAN DISTRIBUTE LITERALLY THOUSANDS OF AUTOGRAPHS TO CHOPTALK SUBSCRIBERS.

*AUTOGRAPH OFFER GOOD WHILE SUPPLIES LAST

Braves CLUBHOUSE COLLECTION

AS AN ADDITIONAL PREMIUM - PERFECT FOR HOLIDAY SHOPPING - ALL SUBSCRIBERS WILL RECEIVE A COUPON FOR 10 PERCENT OFF THEIR NEXT ORDER OF MERCHANDISE FROM THE BRAVES CLUBHOUSE COLLECTION.

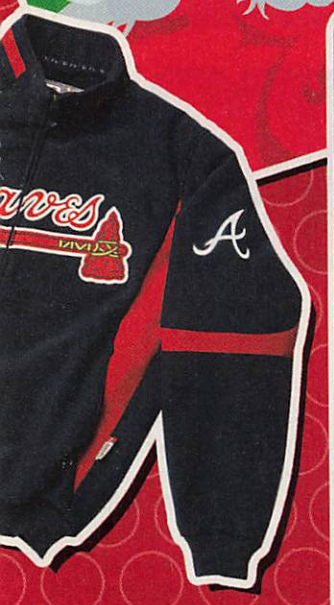
CAPS... T-SHIRTS...
JERSEYS... SPORTSWEAR...
NOVELTIES... SOUVENIRS...
COLLECTIBLES!

TOP QUALITY... BEST SELECTION...

AND 10 PERCENT OFF FOR CHOPTALK SUBSCRIBERS...

ONLY AT THE BRAVES CLUBHOUSE COLLECTION!

THIS 10 PERCENT DISCOUNT TO CHOPTALK SUBSCRIBERS VALID ONLY ON REGULARLY PRICED MERCHANDISE AND IS NON-TRANSFERABLE AND CANNOT BE COMBINED WITH ANY OTHER BRAVES CLUBHOUSE COLLECTION DISCOUNT OFFER.



All you have to do to get one - or more - is to purchase a holiday gift subscription, subscribe yourself, or even renew a current subscription. You or your gift recipient (your choice) will get one autograph for every year of ChopTalk you purchase...

EXAMPLES

A BUY A 1-YEAR GIFT SUSCRIPTION:
GET ONE AUTOGRAPHED HOLIDAY CARD.

B BUY A 2-YEAR SUSCRIPTION FOR YOURSELF:
GET TWO AUTOGRAPHED HOLIDAY CARDS.

C BUY A 2-YEAR GIFT SUSCRIPTION AND RENEW YOUR SUBSCRIPTION FOR 2 YEARS:
GET FOUR AUTOGRAPHED HOLIDAY CARDS.

* OFFER GOOD WHILE SUPPLIES LAST!

○ BUY 2 YEARS FOR $67.95! ○ BUY 1 YEAR FOR $37.95!

ENTER A GIFT SUBSCRIPTION FOR... ○ MAIL AUTOGRAPHED CARDS TO GIFT RECIPIENT.

1

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY STATE ZIP

○ CHECK IF RENEWAL

2

NAME

ADDRESS

CITY STATE ZIP

○ CHECK IF RENEWAL

MY INFO ○ MAIL AUTOGRAPHED CARDS TO ME.
ANY GIFT RECIPIENT WILL BE NOTIFIED WITH A NON-AUTOGRAPHED CARD

NAME PHONE

ADDRESS

CITY STATE ZIP

○ CHECK IF RENEWAL

○ PAYMENT ENCLOSED MAKE OUT CHECKS OR MONEY ORDERS TO "CHOPTALK"

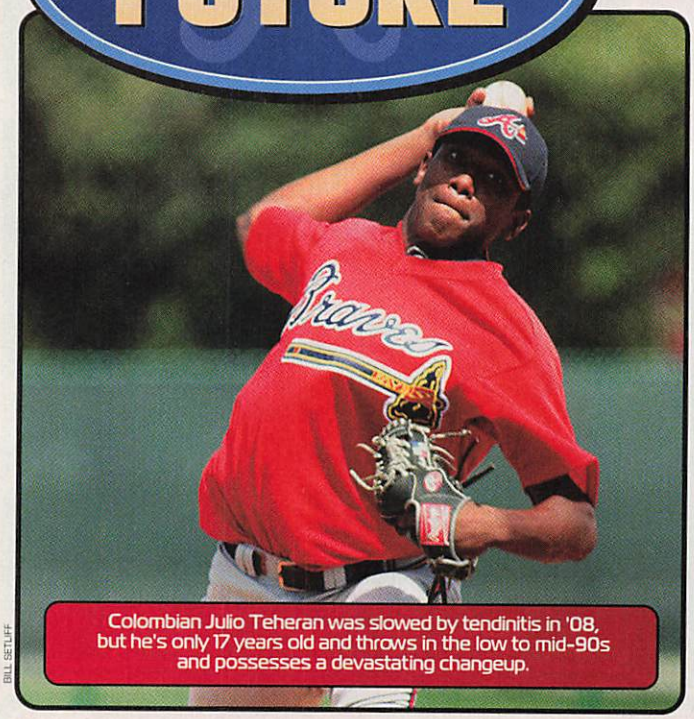
○ BILL MY ENTER CARD # BELOW EXP. DATE
○ VISA ○ MC ○ AMEX

MAIL IT IN... P.O. BOX 80750 CONYERS, GA 30013-8750

PHONE IT IN... 1.877.655.2467 WEB ORDERS... BRAVES.COM/CHOPTALK

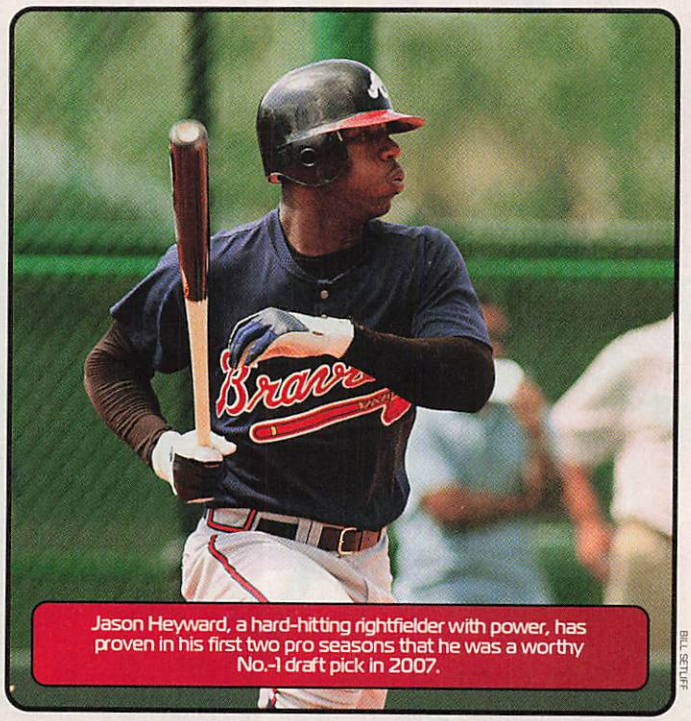
THE FUTURE

Top Prospects



Colombian Julio Teheran was slowed by tendinitis in '08, but he's only 17 years old and throws in the low to mid-90s and possesses a devastating changeup.

BILL SETLIFF



Jason Heyward, a hard-hitting rightfielder with power, has proven in his first two pro seasons that he was a worthy No.-1 draft pick in 2007.

BILL SETLIFF

STATE OF THE FARM

Major Indicators Point To Impending Surge In Development of Talent

BY BILL BALLEW

Many observers believed the Braves bought the farm - or at least gave it away - when they shipped five prospects (Jarrod Saltalamacchia, Elvis Andrus, Matt Harrison, Neftali Feliz and Beau Jones) to the Texas Rangers in exchange for Mark Teixeira and Ron Mahay at the July 31 trading deadline in 2007.

The critics claimed there was no way Atlanta could rebuild its stockpile of top prospects quickly. Then when the Braves failed to reach the post-season with Teixeira at first base and sent him to the Angels a year after acquiring him, the critics howled even louder.

The truth is, most organizations could not absorb such a monumental blow without major repercussions on their farm system. The Braves, however, are not "most organizations."

No other organization in baseball has been more consistently dedicated to developing players in the minors as the Braves have been for more than two decades, beginning in the mid-1980s. That philosophy helped produce the longest streak of first-place finishes in professional sports history (14), and it still has the franchise on solid ground to replenish its roster for a return to contention in the NL East.

The process of predicting success for players and teams is always problematic. Nevertheless, several signs point to the Braves once again heading toward the top of the industry in turning out prospects.

One example is the number of Atlanta farmhands ranked among the top 20 prospects in their respective leagues by the trade publication Baseball America. Seventeen Braves received the recognition in 2008, with outfielder Jason Heyward placing highest at No. 2 in the South Atlantic League (SAL). Only the Angels, also with 17, had as many players recognized as Atlanta.

The Braves also did well in terms of wins and losses throughout the organization in 2008. Double-A Mississippi won the Southern League (SL) championship, and advanced Class A Myrtle Beach led the minor leagues with an 89-51 regular-season record (.636) and reached the Carolina League's championship series. Triple-A Richmond and Class A Rome were the only teams to finish below .500 in the Atlanta farm system, which was represented by nine players on the leagues' year-end all-star teams.

In addition, Heyward was voted by the

TOP PROSPECTS BY POSITION

(Team = Projected Start of 2009)

C TYLER FLOWERS, 23, Mississippi

1B FREDDIE FREEMAN, 19, Myrtle Beach

2B DIORY HERNANDEZ, 24, Gwinnett

3B ERIC CAMPBELL, 23, Mississippi

SS BRANDON HICKS, 23, Mississippi

LF CODY JOHNSON, 20, Myrtle Beach

CF JORDAN SCHAFER, 22, Gwinnett

RF JASON HEYWARD, 19, Myrtle Beach

RHP TOMMY HANSON, 22, Gwinnett

LHP COLE ROHRBOUGH, 21, Myrtle Beach

CLOSER (RH) **CRAIG KIMBREL**, 20, Myrtle Beach

SAL as its top major league prospect, and Todd Redmond was named the SL's Pitcher of the Year.

Another promising indicator is the impressive returns Frank Wren has received in various trades since being named Atlanta's general manager in October 2007. His first deal added pitcher Jair Jurrjens and centerfielder Gorkys Hernandez from Detroit in exchange for shortstop Edgar Renteria. Wren also acquired outfielder Josh Anderson for pitcher Oscar Villarreal from Houston; Redmond from Pittsburgh for reliever Tyler Yates; first baseman Casey Kotchman and pitcher Stephen Marek for Teixeira from the Angels; and outfielder Luis Sumoza from Boston for Mark Kotsay.

Jurrjens and Kotchman are major contributors in Atlanta, Anderson spent September with the team and could be the centerfielder in 2009, and Hernandez, Redmond, Marek and Sumoza are considered solid prospects in the upper reaches of the farm system.

The organization's talent also has become deeper over the past two years with its increased worldwide presence under Johnny Almaraz, the Braves' director of international scouting and operations.

Almaraz was a key component in the signing of such teenagers as Panamanian catcher Christian Bethancourt and Colombian right-handed pitcher Julian Teheran. Victor Cadette, a 17-year-old shortstop from the Dominican Republic, impressed during Fall Instructional League. The Braves signed two players this past summer from Taiwan, and are primary suitors for the services of Japan's 22-year-old right-handed pitcher Junichi Tazawa, who was offered a multi-year major league contract by Wren in November.

Those efforts, combined with a state-of-the-art academy in the Dominican that opened in late 2007, have headlined the Braves' reemergence as a global organization.

Naturally, the bulk of the young talent comes from the United States, where scouting director Roy Clark and his staff continue to make the most of their opportunities every June in the amateur draft. No team used the draft-and-follow process better than the Braves before the method of extended evaluation for draft picks at two-year schools was eliminated in 2007.

As a result, Clark opted to go a different route in 2008 by drafting 10 players out of the junior college ranks among Atlanta's first 15 picks. The team's top three selections were high school pitchers, while the other two were pitchers from four-year colleges. That strategy produced some impressive early results in short-season leagues last summer while generating an impressive amount of depth, particularly on the mound, in the lower levels of the farm system.

Regardless of where the boys who would be Braves come from, they all have common characteristics. Again, using the same approach as Braves Hall of Fame scouting director Paul Snyder and former GM Bobby Cox employed in the 1980s, the Braves look for power arms from right-handed pitchers, a feel for pitching from the lefties, and a combination of speed and power among the everyday players. What's more, everyone must pass the makeup test, meaning they possess the quality characteristics as people needed in order to win championships at the major league level.

Not all prospects reach the promised land due to injuries and a variety of other hurdles. Some are traded for major leaguers, with the Braves doing the best job in the industry of accurately evaluating their own players and making the correct decisions regarding which minor leaguers to include in deals.

The process is never simple, but through the organization's dedication to developing talent, the farm system will continue to be an integral part of the Braves' success at the major league level for the foreseeable future.

CHOPTALK'S TOP 10 PROSPECTS

(Rank, player, age as of Opening Day 2009, position, 2008 club(s), composite '08 stats - BA-HR-RBI for hitters; W-L, ERA for pitchers)

1. **JASON HEYWARD**
   19, OF, Rome/Myrtle Beach, .316-11-56
2. **TOMMY HANSON**
   22, RHP, Myrtle Beach/Mississippi, 11-5, 2.41
3. **JORDAN SCHAFER**
   22, OF, Mississippi, .269-10-51
4. **COLE ROHRBOUGH,**
   21, LHP, Rome/Myrtle Beach, 5-6, 4.40
5. **GORKYS HERNANDEZ**
   21, OF, Myrtle Beach, .264-5-42
6. **FREDDIE FREEMAN**
   19, 1B, Rome, .316-18-95
7. **JEFF LOCKE**
   21, LHP, Rome, 5-12, 4.06
8. **TYLER FLOWERS**
   23, C, Myrtle Beach, .288-17-88
9. **BRANDON HICKS**
   23, SS, Myrtle Beach/Mississippi, .235-20-63
10. **KRIS MEDLEN**
    23, RHP, Mississippi, 7-8, 3.52

THE NEXT 20

11. **CRAIG KIMBREL**
    20, RHP, Danville/Rome/Myrtle Beach, 3-2, 0.51
12. **CODY JOHNSON**
    20, OF, Rome, .252-26-89
13. **JULIO TEHERAN**
    18, RHP, Danville, 1-2, 6.60
14. **RANDALL DELGADO**
    19, RHP, Danville, 3-8, 3.13
15. **BRETT DEVALL**
    19, LHP, Gulf Coast, 0-0, 0.93
16. **EDGAR OSUNA**
    21, LHP, Rome, 10-5, 3.38
17. **BRENT LILLIBRIDGE**
    25, SS, Richmond, .220-4-39
18. **ZEKE SPRUILL**
    19, RHP, Gulf Coast, 7-0, 2.93
19. **ERIC CAMPBELL**
    23, 3B, Myrtle Beach, .255-19-67
20. **SANTOS RODRIGUEZ**
    21, LHP, Gulf Coast, 1-2, 2.79
21. **CHAD RODGERS**
    21, LHP, Rome, 2-10, 4.53
22. **LUIS SUMOZA**
    20, OF, Lowell/Rome, .292-11-41
23. **BRAEDEN SCHLEHUBER**
    21, C, Gulf Coast, .268-0-11
24. **MATT KENNELLY**
    20, C, Danville, .246-4-25
25. **SCOTT DIAMOND**
    22, LHP, Rome/Myrtle Beach, 15-3, 2.89
26. **JACOB THOMPSON**
    22, RHP, Danville/Rome, 0-0, 1.86
27. **JON GILMORE**
    20, 3B, Rome/Danville, .294-4-35
28. **JAMES PARR**
    23, RHP, Mississippi/Richmond, 13-7, 3.52
29. **TODD REDMOND**
    23, RHP, Mississippi, 13-5, 3.52
30. **DIORY HERNANDEZ**
    24, 2B, Mississippi/Richmond, .287-7-61

THE FUTURE

TOP POSITION PLAYERS

1 **JASON HEYWARD, OF**
The organization's first-round draft pick in 2007 is a prototypical rightfielder who was named the top major league prospect in the South Atlantic League in 2008.

2 **JORDAN SCHAFER, OF**
The franchise's top prospect last winter continued to show five-tool ability after overcoming an early suspension at Double-A last season.

3 **GORKYS HERNANDEZ, OF**
Former Detroit farmhand is a classic centerfielder/leadoff hitter who could really make the Edgar Renteria deal look like grand theft.

4 **FREDDIE FREEMAN, 1B**
Second-round pick in 2007 paced Rome in most hitting categories last season to earn team MVP honors.

5 **TYLER FLOWERS, C**
Showed marked improvement behind the plate and displayed powerful bat with a keen eye at Myrtle Beach, then continued to impress in Arizona Fall League.

6 **BRANDON HICKS, SS**
Fast-rising infielder from Texas A&M has great hands, strong arm, above-average power, and gritty determination to win.

7 **CODY JOHNSON, OF**
No one in the minors has more power than this first-round pick in 2006, who made strides in becoming a more complete hitter last season.

8 **BRENT LILLIBRIDGE, SS**
A difficult season at the plate takes little away from this strong infielder who could be a valuable utilityman in Atlanta as soon as 2009.

9 **ERIC CAMPBELL, 3B**
Steady run producer and fielder is working his way back up the prospect list after clearing a few personal hurdles.

10 **LUIS SUMOZA, OF**
Acquired from the Boston organization for Mark Kotsay, this Venezuelan is a strong defensive rightfielder with a line-drive bat and power potential.

11 **BRAEDEN SCHLEHUBER, C**
Fourth-round pick in 2008 has an excellent combination of power and speed, as well as a cannon of an arm behind the plate.

12 **MATT KENNELLY, C**
Australian opened eyes in the Appalachian League last season as a 19-year-old with his strong defensive abilities and improving bat.

13 **JON GILMORE, 3B**
Iowa high school standout overcame a rough start at Rome to earn all-star recognition in the Appalachian League.

14 **DIORY HERNANDEZ, 2B**
Versatile middle infielder that drives in runs with extra-base pop in his bat is on the verge of knocking on the door in Atlanta.

15 **TRAVIS JONES, 2B**
University of South Carolina product earned Carolina League all-star honors while serving as a catalyst for Myrtle Beach's 89-win season.

16 **CONCEPCION RODRIGUEZ, OF**
After enduring a year to forget in 2007, the rightfielder breezed through Rome and maintained his pace after promotion to Myrtle Beach.

17 **ERNESTO MEJIA, 1B**
Enjoyed a breakout season in 2008 with 73 extra-base hits, 93 RBIs and a minor league-best 47 doubles.

18 **VAN POPE, 3B**
Premier defensive infielder with a strong arm who needs to make more consistent contact with more power.

19 **KALA KA'AIHUE, 1B**
Power-hitter who needs to find a way to avoid slow starts to the regular season.

20 **ROBERT BROOKS, 2B**
Twentieth-round pick in June out of Walters State Community College was the offensive catalyst in the Gulf Coast League.

TOP PITCHERS

1 **TOMMY HANSON (R)**
The addition of a Smoltz-like slider allowed him to dominate two leagues and pace the minors with an opponents' batting average of .175.

2 **COLE ROHRBOUGH (L)**
Battled rotator cuff tendinitis and an ankle injury in 2008 yet continued to display three above-average major league pitches.

3 **JEFF LOCKE (L)**
Possesses three "plus" pitches and the ability to be a workhorse in the big leagues.

4 **KRIS MEDLEN (L)**
After two dominating years in the bullpen, moved to the rotation in June and pitched so well he could be in the mix to start in Atlanta this spring.

5 **CRAIG KIMBREL (R)**
Third-round pick in June jumped on the fast track by allowing only 16 hits in 35 innings while averaging 14.3 strikeouts per nine innings.

6 **JULIO TEHERAN (R)**
Shoulder soreness limited the 17-year-old from Colombia in 2008, but he looked strong during Instructional League.

7 **RANDALL DELGADO (R)**
Panamanian ranked second in strikeouts and ninth in ERA and was named sixth-best prospect in the Appalachian League last season.

8 **BRETT DEVALL (L)**
First-round draft pick has impressive long-term potential in spite of early shutdown due to forearm soreness.

9 **EDGAR OSUNA (L)**
Rome's pitcher of the year in 2008 can start and relieve with equal effectiveness, thanks to a nasty changeup.

10 **ZEKE SPRUILL (R)**
Second-round pick in 2008 from nearby Marietta began pro career with a 7-0 record in the Gulf Coast League.

11 **SANTOS RODRIGUEZ (L)**
Six-foot-six closer averaged 13.97 strikeouts per nine innings and limited Gulf Coast League hitters to a .155 average in 2008.

12 **CHAD RODGERS (L)**
A strained shoulder limited him to 22 innings in the second half, but the third-round pick from 2006 is headed in the right direction.

13 **SCOTT DIAMOND (L)**
Signed as a non-drafted free agent in late 2007, the Canadian from Binghamton University paced the organization with 15 wins.

14 **JACOB THOMPSON (R)**
The University of Virginia product taken in the fifth round in June could prove to be the steal of the draft.

15 **JAMES PARR (R)**
A strong finish in Triple-A and a solid September with Atlanta has him battling for a starting job with the Braves.

16 **TODD REDMOND (R)**
Acquired from the Pirates in spring training for Tyler Yates, he was the Southern League Pitcher of the Year.

17 **J.J. HOOVER (R)**
A 10th-rounder who signed in August to a substantial bonus after displaying four excellent pitches, including a mid-90s fastball.

18 **DAVID FRANCIS (R)**
An unheralded pick in the 12th round from Walters State Community College made headlines with 16 strikeouts in a six-inning stint at Danville.

19 **DEUNTE HEATH (R)**
One of the hardest throwers in the organization, the University of Tennessee product made the climb to Double-A and could be a setup man in the majors.

20 **TYLER STOVALL (L)**
The top pitching prospect in Alabama and the second-round draft pick in 2008 keeps hitters off-balance with curveball/changeup combo.

CATCH! EVERY ISSUE

$6.00 EACH
INCLUDES POSTAGE & HANDLING
SUPPLIES LIMITED!

TO ORDER CALL:
1.877.655.CHOP (2467)

CHOPTALK BACK ISSUES
P.O. BOX 80750
CONYERS, GA. 30013-8750

Send a check or money order payable to ChopTalk, with your name, address and the dates of the issue(s) you would like.

April 2005	Starting Rotation
May 2005	Andruw Jones
June 2005	Tim Hudson
July 2005	Kyle Davies
August 2005	Johnson & Langerhans
September 2005	Jeff Francoeur
October 2005	Andruw Jones
November 2005	Brian McCann
December 2005	Andruw Jones
January 2006	Edgar Renteria
February 2006	Niekro, Aaron, Lemaster
March 2006	LaRoche Family
April 2006	Andruw, Smoltz, Chipper
May 2006	Chris Reitsma
June 2006	Francoeur's Slam
July 2006	Edgar Renteria
August 2006	Brian McCann
September 2006	Bob Wickman
October 2006	John Smoltz
November 2006	Bobby Cox
December 2006	Jeff Francoeur
January 2007	Rafael Soriano
February 2007	Spring Training
March 2007	Mike Gonzalez
April 2007	Andruw Jones (Sold Out)
May 2007	Hubbard & Johnson (Sold Out)
June 2007	John Smoltz
July 2007	Diaz & Harris
August 2007	Edgar Renteria
September 2007	Mark Teixeira
October 2007	Jeff Francoeur
November 2007	Chipper Jones
December 2007	John Smoltz
January 2008	Tom Glavine
February 2008	Tim Hudson
March 2008	Mark Kotsay
April 2008	Teixeira & Jones
May 2008	Brian McCann
June 2008	Jair Jurrjens
July 2008	Chipper Jones
August 2008	McCann & Jones
September 2008	Skip Caray
October 2008	Brian McCann
November 2008	Chipper Jones

dish NETWORK

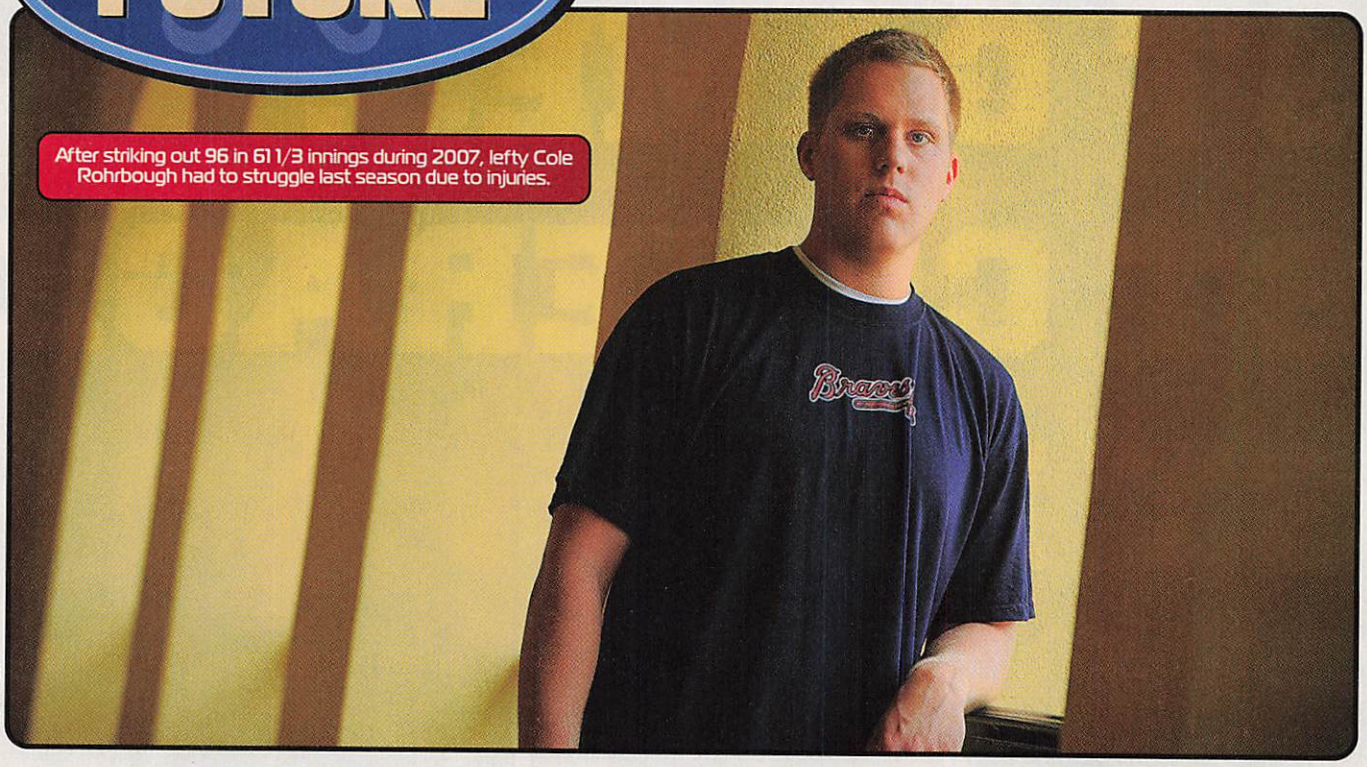
FSN ch.420 | SPSO ch.437

DIRE

FSN ch.630 |

ECTV®
SPSO ch.631

comcast®
FSN ch.48 | SPSO ch.53 | HD ch.848
in metro Atlanta



After striking out 96 in 61 1/3 innings during 2007, lefty Cole Rohrbough had to struggle last season due to injuries.

SCOTT MILLER

A PROSPECT'S STORY

Cole Rohrbough's Talent and Makeup Are Unmistakable, Even In Bad Times

BY BILL BALLEW

It would be easy for Braves fans to dismiss Cole Rohrbough as another one-year wonder in the lower reaches of the Atlanta farm system. After all, the 21-year-old lefthander followed his impressive pro debut in 2007 with a modest 5-6 record and 4.40 ERA in 2008.

Fans like numbers, and Rohrbough flashed them in 2007. He was named the Appalachian League's top prospect and was a combined 5-2 with a 1.17 ERA and 96 strikeouts in 61 1/3 innings at Danville and Rome.

No one in the Braves organization felt Rohrbough was a flash-in-the-pan when he battled inconsistency this past season, and once the schedule ended, the reason for his struggles became evident.

Rohrbough pitched just 90 innings in 2008, and he did it on an ankle that required reconstructive surgery - three screws, three cadaver ligaments, and the removal of bone chips - after the season ended. The good news is that he spent the last two months rehabilitating it at the Braves' spring training base at Disney's Wide World of Sports and should be ready to resume domination of hitters when the new season begins.

The road to the majors is not easy, even for the best of prospects.

"The bottom line is I just did not have my same stuff," said Rohrbough of the 18 outings at Rome and Myrtle Beach he attempted on the bad ankle last season. "I learned to battle through it. I was able to grow a lot as a pitcher, particularly from the mental side.

"I got hit around a lot more, and that was a big piece of humble pie. But I learned how to keep my composure on the mound, regardless of the situation. And since I wasn't able to push off with my ankle, it forced me to throw my changeup a lot more, which made that pitch a lot better."

Rohrbough's difficulties began last winter while working out in preparation for the 2008 season. He suffered a third-degree ankle sprain while running, which led to his hobbling into spring training. Shortly after he began throwing in Florida, Rohrbough felt discomfort in his left shoulder. That ailment was diagnosed as rotator cuff tendinitis, forcing him to wait until mid-May before opening the season at Rome in the South Atlantic League.

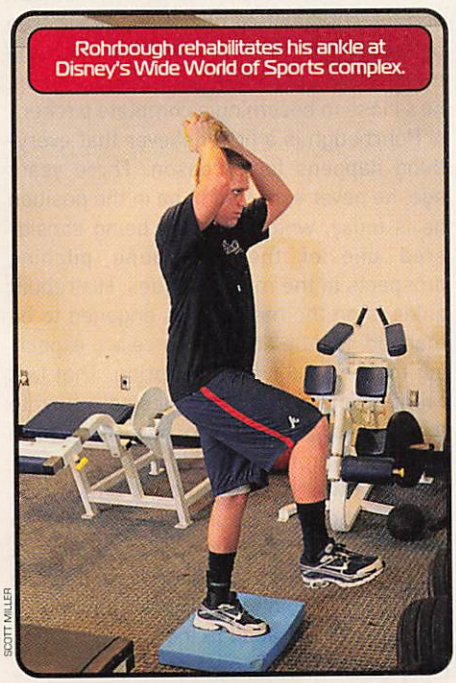
Inconsistency marked his next two-and-a-half months. He surrendered three or more earned runs in seven starts, yet also pitched brilliantly on occasion, such as his 1-hit effort over eight shutout innings at Hickory on Aug. 5, his last start before a promotion to the advanced Class A Carolina League.

Rohrbough then experienced the same roller-coaster ride at Myrtle Beach, giving up four earned runs in each of his first two starts with the Pelicans, but also limiting Wilmington to two hits over seven shutouts innings on Aug. 26.

Aside from the ups and downs, the constant throughout the season was the pain in Rohrbough's ankle. Doctors cleared him during the spring, when their diagnosis suggested nothing more than lingering tendinitis. However, at the end of the season, he had the ankle reevaluated by physicians in Myrtle Beach, and an MRI revealed two completely torn ligaments and a third that was 75 percent shredded. Two weeks later, Rohrbough underwent surgery.

"The rehab is going really well," Rohrbough said. "Most of the doctors I have talked to believe my ankle injury was putting a lot more stress on my shoulder. Luckily I was able to finish the season without any other injuries. The hardest part now is having to wait until spring training to pitch again."

The fact that Rohrbough persevered through serious injury should not come as a surprise, particularly when the road he has traveled to this point is understood. The native of Medford, Ore., began playing baseball at age five, and worked his way through Little League, Babe Ruth League and high school ranks. Despite enjoying solid success at North Medford High, he knew the odds were stacked against him in terms of playing at higher levels.



Rohrbough rehabilitates his ankle at Disney's Wide World of Sports complex.

SCOTT MILLER

"I never saw one professional scout in all my years in high school," Rohrbough said. "I never even considered the thought of going pro. In high school, I had possibly the best coach and the best guy you'd ever meet as my coach, a man named Brett Wolfe. He spent a lot of time with me, both on and off the field, and was a real mentor to me. He helped me develop some maturity that I was probably lacking."

Rohrbough pitched well for North Medford and also had success in a high school summer league. In the summer prior to his senior season, Rohrbough caught the attention of Kevin Edwards, who was recruiting for Western Nevada College, which was starting a baseball program for the 2005-06 school year.

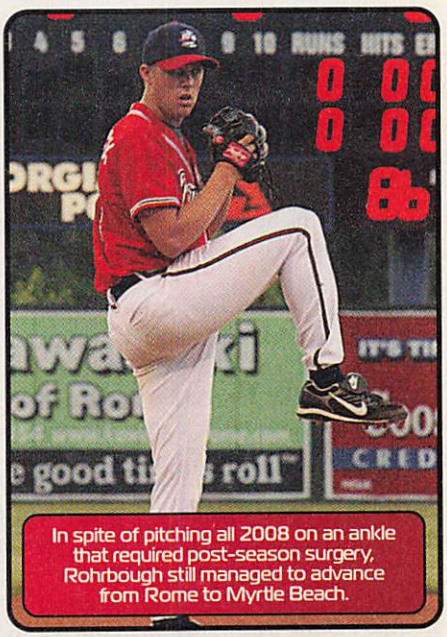
"The only college that offered me a chance to play was Western Nevada, a first-year program," Rohrbough said. "I was just grateful to have the chance to play in college. As it turned out, that was by far the best decision I ever made."

More personal development took place for Rohrbough as he continued his education. In addition to adding upwards of nine miles an hour to his fastball, thanks to an increase in height, weight and strength, he displayed additional maturity off the field. According to Western Nevada head coach D.J. Whittemore, several players were kicked off the team for violating rules during the program's first season. Rohrbough met with Whittemore after the announcement was made.

"Cole said, 'I hung out with those guys, but I'm committed to doing the right thing,'" Whittemore said. "From then on, he changed his sleeping habits, his eating habits, his studying habits. He committed his heart and soul to the game. He became a sponge with the way he soaked up everything he could to become better."

His commitment became so intense, according to Whittemore, that virtually every waking moment was dedicated to improving.

Pitching coach Dennis Banks taught Rohrbough a new grip for his curveball, which quickly developed into a dominating pitch. Edwards, the Wildcats' pitching and catching coach, noticed Rohrbough was throwing across his body, so he had him repeat his delivery 100 times a day while striding more directly toward the plate.



In spite of pitching all 2008 on an ankle that required post-season surgery, Rohrbough still managed to advance from Rome to Myrtle Beach.

BILL SETLIFF

Rohrbough also took a sports psychology course that led to reducing his walks from an average of 4.5 to 2.0 per game. He even fell asleep most nights while listening to Heads-Up Baseball by Ken Ravizza on tape.

The efforts paid handsome dividends. After posting a 5-3 record with a 4.15 ERA in 15 games as a freshman, Rohrbough improved to a 10-3 mark with a 1.73 ERA in 17 starts as a sophomore. The Wildcats also showed tremendous progress, so much so that they reached the Junior College World Series, with Rohrbough being named to the all-tournament team.

"Everything came together for him," Whittemore said. "He wanted to learn and try new things, and he made the sacrifices that were necessary for those things to happen. At the same time, he made huge physical gains, and he continued to display his incredible mental toughness. He became a premier pitcher because he wanted it so badly."

Rohrbough's performance did not go unnoticed. Braves scout Tim Moore saw the lefthander during his freshman season at Western Nevada and convinced scouting director Roy Clark to select Rohrbough in the 22nd round in 2006. Under the draft rules at that time, a major league team could maintain the rights to a junior college

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

BIG UNIT'S STATS FAVOR ONE SEASON AT WRIGLEY

THE CUBS' interest in 45-year-old free-agent lefthander **Randy Johnson** isn't difficult to explain: Johnson is 11-0 with a 1.85 ERA in 12 career starts against the Cubs, 3-0 with a 1.00 ERA in four career starts at Wrigley Field. The likelihood that he will sign only a one-year contract to chase the five more wins he needs for 300 adds to his appeal for teams in need of starting pitching.

The Dodgers pursued a deal for shortstop **Orlando Cabrera** during the season, and could renew their interest in Cabrera if they lose **Rafael Furcal** as a free agent. **Blake DeWitt** could move back from second to third base if **Casey Blake** departs. Second baseman **Orlando Hudson**, targeted by numerous clubs, would be a good fit – but the Dodgers need to spend in too many other areas.

The Yankees' interest in free-agent first baseman **Mark Teixeira** diminished after they acquired **Nick Swisher**, but could revive if they fail to land the free-agent starting pitchers they desire – and if Teixeira is willing to accept a four- or five-year contract with a high average salary. Teixeira said during the season that he wanted a 10-year deal.

The Brewers were in no rush to trade shortstop **J.J. Hardy**. "We haven't put him out there yet. I'm not sure we will," general manager **Doug Melvin** said. "Teams will call and say they're interested in Hardy. But if you're interested, tell me what you're talking about. I can ask for names, but I'm not doing that at this point. If they have interest, they can let me know. Only one team did that, and they were talking about a fifth starter."

The Cardinals want to add one or two left-handed relievers perhaps even more than a closer, and the free-agent market should enable them to pick and choose. Among the left-handed relievers available: **Jeremy Affeldt**, **Alan Embree**, **Joe Beimel**, **Trever Miller**, **Will Ohman**, **Darren Oliver**, **Dennys Reyes** and **Arthur Rhodes**.

The Reds are looking for right-handed power, and general manager **Walt Jocketty** acknowledged speaking with the Rockies about **Matt Holliday** before his trade to Oakland. The Reds also inquired about the Marlins' **Josh Willingham** before he was traded to the Nationals, and remained interested in Rockies infielder **Garrett Atkins**.

The Astros failed in their effort to quickly re-sign free-agent lefthander **Randy Wolf**. At least a half-dozen teams expressed interest in Wolf, who went 6-2 with a 3.57 ERA in 12 starts after getting traded from the Padres to the Astros. Wolf, 32, might prefer to return to the West coast. His last two contracts were one-year deals with the Dodgers and Padres.

Many in the industry were surprised by the Cubs' willingness to part with Double-A righthander **Jose Ceda** for righty **Kevin Gregg**, who becomes a free agent after next season. Ceda, 6-foot-4 and 275 pounds, is a big, strong reliever with dominating power stuff. "He looks like **Armando Benitez**," one exec says. From a scouting perspective, at least, that's a compliment.

- KEN ROSENTHAL IS A SENIOR WRITER FOR FOXSPORTS.COM

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

player until a week prior to the next annual draft. Moore kept close tabs on Rohrbough, who wound up signing with the Braves for a reported $675,000 at the conclusion of the NJCAA World Series.

"The thing I liked about Cole was his work ethic and his makeup," Moore said. "He always asked questions and wanted to get better. He was a little inconsistent with his fastball velocity and also with his curveball during his freshman year, but he got stronger and his mechanics got better. He was also able to repeat his delivery and arm angle, and his competitive drive was something that we noticed as an organization.

"He had talent and was a very respectful and well-mannered kid, which is the kind of player we want."

Shortly after signing with Atlanta, the 6-foot-3, 220-pound Rohrbough reported to Danville in the Appalachian League. In eight outings, he went 3-2 with a 1.08 ERA, limiting opponents to a .167 batting average. His worst performance was his first one, after which pitching coach Jim Czajkowski realized Rohrbough was nearly untouchable when his arm slot was over the top but was more hittable when he dropped down.

By throwing over the top more consistently, Rohrbough improved his fastball from the upper 80s to the mid-90s, enabling him to go 2-0 with a 1.29 ERA in six August starts at Rome.

"As soon as he made that adjustment, it was lights out," said Czajkowski, who also coached Rohrbough at Rome in 2008. "The hitters couldn't touch him. With his fastball and his curveball combination, he's a true power pitcher. And now that he's become much more consistent with his changeup, he's close to becoming a complete pitcher."

Rohrbough is a firm believer that everything happens for a reason. Three years ago, he never expected to be in the position he is today, which includes being considered one of the top young pitching prospects in the minor leagues. His rebuilt ankle is on the mend, he is engaged to be married, and he and his fiancé are expecting their first child in the spring. That last event dovetails with his expected return to the mound, all of which has Rohrbough ready to take on the world.

"I can't wait to be out there next spring," said Rohrbough, a tough and driven man on the mound. "I'm just looking forward to not worrying about my ankle and starting the season on Opening Day. There's nothing I'd rather be doing, and I'm looking forward to pitching the way I know I can."

Catcher Tyler Flowers (L) and outfielder Matt Young (R) were two of the top hitters in the Arizona Fall League, and righthander Tommy Hanson (inset) was 4-0 with a 0.76 ERA.

PHOTOS: RICHARD DARBY

Desert Thunder

Flowers, Hanson Taking Arizona Fall League By Storm

BY ROBERT MARTINEZ

THE ARIZONA FALL LEAGUE (AFL) is a highly regarded proving ground for success in the majors. So keep a close watch on Tyler Flowers and Tommy Hanson, and don't let Matt Young, Steve Marek and Kris Medlen out of sight for long either.

In the league that sent the likes of Derek Jeter, Mike Piazza, Todd Helton, Albert Pujols and Jimmy Rollins to the majors, Braves prospects Hanson and Flowers are the top pitcher and slugger this year.

With only six games left on the 38-game schedule of the Mesa Solar Sox, Hanson, a 22-year-old righthander who dominated at Myrtle Beach and Mississippi last season, was continuing to do the same against a higher level of competition. He led the league with a 4-0 record and 39 strikeouts in 23 2/3 innings and was second in ERA (0.76).

Flowers, a 22-year-old catcher who hasn't played above advanced Class A Myrtle Beach, led the AFL in home runs (10), slugging percentage (1.000) and OPS (1.458) on base plus slugging percentage.

"I think our group as a whole might be one of the strongest we've ever sent out to the Fall League," said Frank Wren, who stopped in Arizona on his way back from the general managers meetings in Southern California to see the Atlanta contingent of seven players. "From an organizational standpoint of guys we envision playing in the major leagues in the short term, as well as just how they performed out here-offensively and pitching-wise, they rank statistically among the best out here."

Flowers, who has fewer at-bats than most of the other league leaders because he's a catcher and doesn't play every day, put an exclamation point on his fall Nov. 12 when he hit three home runs and added a sacrifice fly to drive in seven runs, the best day of his pro career. The performance boosted his batting average to .387 and his RBI total to 18, both among the league leaders.

On the same day Flowers hit three homers, Hanson worked five strong innings, giving up three hits and a walk and striking out nine. That followed a five-inning, 11-strikout effort six days earlier with Wren in the stands.

"I try and attack hitters," said Hanson, who was working on developing a changeup. "If I strike the guy out, that's okay. If he puts it in play, that's fine too - as long as I get him out."

The performances of Flowers and Hanson overshadowed some excellent play by Young, Marek and Medlen.

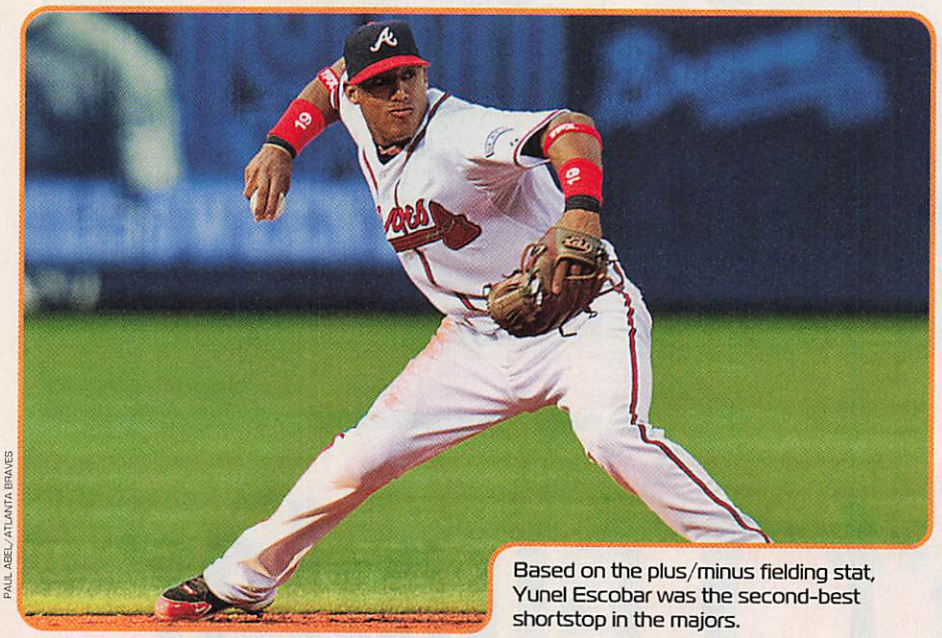
Young, a speedy, left-handed-hitting, 26-year-old outfielder who helped Mississippi win the Southern League championship, was hitting .363 and was tied for third in the league in doubles (9) and was fourth in runs (26).

The Braves acquired Marek, a 25-year-old righthander, from the Angels in the July trading deadline deal that brought Casey Kotchman to Atlanta in exchange for Mark Teixeira. He's 2-0 with two saves and a 0.00 ERA in 10 innings of relief, striking out six and issuing just one walk.

Medlen, a 23-year-old right-handed reliever, was 0-1 with a 2.65 ERA and 19 strikeouts (one walk) in 17 innings.

Van Pope was hitting .250, and righthander Deunte Heath was 1-0 with a 9.53 ERA for the Solar Sox, who are managed by Myrtle Beach's Rocket Wheeler.

INFIELDERS' GLOVES RANK AMONG BEST



PAUL ABEL/ATLANTA BRAVES

Based on the plus/minus fielding stat, Yunel Escobar was the second-best shortstop in the majors.

BY STEVE FALL

OVER THE COURSE of the 2008 season, Yunel Escobar made 21 more defensive plays than an average shortstop would have made. That information comes from the plus/minus fielding statistic.

Baseball Info Solutions tracks each play to determine how far above and below average all fielders fared during the season. Escobar's +21 figure led every major league shortstop except Philadelphia's Jimmy Rollins (+23), who won the 2007 NL Gold Glove at short.

While statistics effectively measure almost every aspect of hitting and pitching, fielding stats have lagged. The most commonly used metric, fielding percentage, only evaluates fielders on plays when they reach the ball.

Range factor – the number of successful defensive plays made by a fielder per nine innings – goes much further than fielding percentage, but has its own shortcomings. For example, fielders that play behind pitching staffs with high strikeout totals tend to have lower range factors.

The plus/minus stat reveals that Kelly Johnson, who posted a -1 figure, played close to an average second base in 2008. Philadelphia's Chase Utley led all second basemen with an outstanding +47.

Chipper Jones fared well at third base. His +9 figure ranked 10th among third basemen, but trailed just Blake DeWitt (+11) and Ryan Zimmerman (+10) in the NL. Martin Prado, who filled in for Jones at times, turned in a +5 while playing third. Casey Kotchman (+13 with the Braves and Angels combined) rounded out a strong defensive infield.

Jeff Francoeur, who had an impressive +10 figure in 2007, fell to -17 last year. Gregor Blanco performed slightly above average defensively in left field (+3) and just below normal as a centerfielder (-4).

Baseball Info Solutions also provides information on how outfielders impact baserunner advancement. Runners had 116 opportunities to take an extra base against Francoeur in 2008. They advanced successfully 55 times, he threw out six other runners, and on 55 occasions the baserunner elected not to take the chance. That meant that 47.4 percent succeeded in advancing against Francoeur, which ranked 11th among rightfielders.

While outfield assists totals have always been available, they only reveal how many runners an outfielder throws out. That fails to account for how a strong outfield arm can limit potential advancement on the basepaths.

Plus/minus has its shortcomings. Determining what balls an average fielder would have reached is subjective, and depends on the accuracy of the researchers. Plus/minus still has advantages over most defensive metrics, and it's easy to understand.

When a home run barely clears the fence, announcers may say that it would have been a long out in another park. Now, it's possible to find out if this is true. The website hittrackeronline.com provides fascinating data on every home run hit. Among its features, the website determines the number of major league ballparks in which each home run would have cleared the fence. While Greg Norton hit just seven home runs for the Braves last season, three would have left all 30 parks. Meanwhile, just five of Brian McCann's 24 homers would have left every park.

The website factors in the effect of wind, temperature and altitude on each home run ball to determine the "standard distance" of each blast. While Chipper Jones had one of his lower career home run totals, his 22 long balls averaged 402.1 feet. That gave him the 10th longest average standard distance in baseball. Surprisingly, Jones hit just one of the club's 10 longest home runs. Mark Teixeira had three of them before getting traded. Norton and McCann had two apiece.

The Braves will need to produce more home runs next year to climb the NL East standings. They played 76 of 162 games (47 percent) without hitting a homer in 2008. That marked a dramatic drop from 2007, when they had 58 non-homer games (36 percent). In 2006, it happened just 43 times (26 percent). Prior to last season, the Braves had not had as many as 76 games without a home run since the 1988 season (92). Their 2008 figure also gave Atlanta more non-homer games than all but two other NL clubs: the Giants (92) and Nationals (81).

The Braves offense suffered when nobody went deep. They averaged just 3.11 runs in the 76 games without a homer, versus 6.01 when they had at least one home run. They had a 23-53 (.303) record in their zero home run games compared to 49-37 (.570) in all other games.

LIVE IT. WATCH IT. LOVE IT.
04/03/2008 Watch LIVE games online on MLB.TV
LIVE
NEWS: 2008 promises to be a banner
GATE 6 SEC 19 BOX/ROW 285 D SEAT 5 PRICE $35.00
Braves
Visit BRAVES.com,
the official site for Braves fans, and
get more from the team you love.
LIVE Games, Fantasy, Tickets,
News, Stats and Authentic Gear.
braves.com
Where baseball
is always on
©2008 MLB Advanced Media, L.P. All rights reserved. All Major League Baseball trademarks and service marks used herein are the property of the applicable MLB entity.

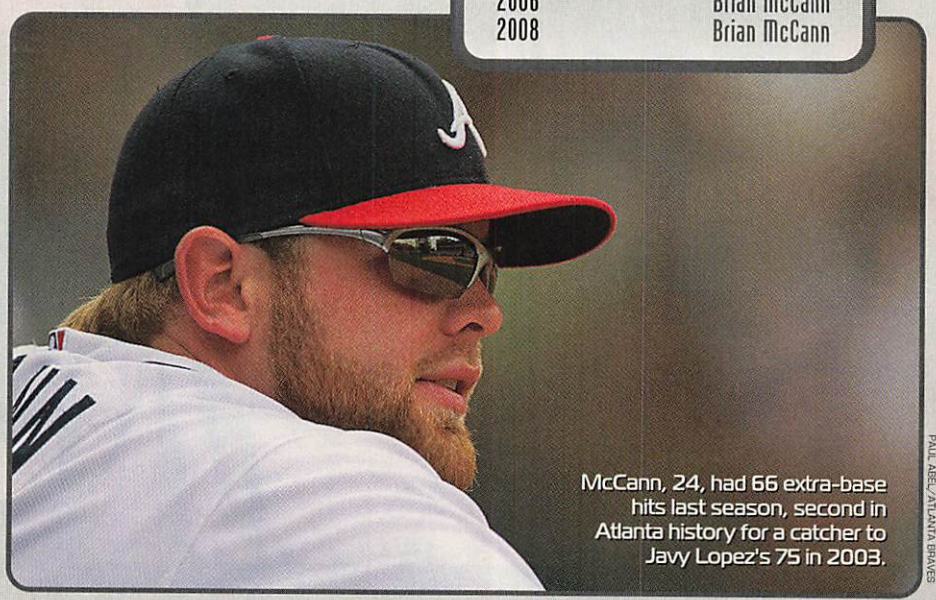
BIG STICK

McCann Wins Second Silver Slugger As Best Hitting Catcher in NL

BY MARK BOWMAN
OF MLB.COM

BRAVES SILVER SLUGGER CATCHERS

2003	Javy Lopez
2004	Johnny Estrada
2006	Brian McCann
2008	Brian McCann



McCann, 24, had 66 extra-base hits last season, second in Atlanta history for a catcher to Javy Lopez's 75 in 2003.

PAUL ABEL/ATLANTA BRAVES

BRIAN McCANN was well aware of the impressive season produced by Geovany Soto, the Cubs' NL Rookie of the Year. Still, he was confident that his statistics were as impressive as those of any other National League catcher.

Fortunately for McCann, the coaches and managers who voted on this year's Louisville Silver Slugger Awards agreed.

McCann picked up his second Silver Slugger Award by leading all NL catchers with a .301 batting average, a .523 slugging percentage and an .896 OPS (on-base percentage plus slugging percentage). Only Soto matched his 23 homers.

"Any time you're recognized for an award it's special," McCann said. "You don't play the game for awards, but it sure is nice to know that you finished the season strong and people recognized what you did."

Although he has played just three full seasons in the majors, McCann has already earned three All-Star selections and won two Silver Slugger Awards. His first came in 2006, when he established career highs in batting average (.333) and homers (24).

"After the season, I went home and didn't know what I'd done," McCann said. "I don't know if I'll ever be able to hit for that kind of average again."

McCann has been blessed with physical talents and the regular instruction he's received from his father, Howie McCann, a former collegiate coach who owns and runs the Winward Baseball Academy in suburban Atlanta.

While his numbers might have been better during the 2006 season, McCann says that this year he actually felt he had a better feel for the powerful left-handed swing that has helped him find so much early success during his career.

"I felt like I had a much better grasp on hitting than I did in the past," McCann said. "The older I'm getting, I'm getting a better grasp of my swing."

Despite all of the success that he's enjoyed early in his career, McCann has committed himself to a strict physical conditioning program this off-season. He's sticking to a strict diet, which includes a lot of chicken, and is jogging regularly through his suburban Atlanta neighborhood.

"I'm just incorporating more running and less eating," said McCann.

As a result, he's dropped 20 pounds since the end of the regular season, going from 248 to 228 as of mid-November.

McCann's improved physical condition will lessen strain on his knees and should allow him to stay strong while dealing with the physical grinds a catcher encounters.

Although he hit just three homers with a .433 slugging percentage during his final 50 games last season, McCann didn't feel like he was affected by fatigue. Instead, he believes it had more to do with moving from the fifth spot of the lineup to the cleanup position after Mark Teixeira was traded on July 29.

"I got pitched to a little different," McCann said. "I didn't get as many balls in the middle of the plate as I'd have liked. I don't feel like I wore down at all."

Although Chipper Jones won his first career batting title with a .364 batting average and ranked second in the NL with a 1.044 OPS, he did not win his third career Silver Slugger. Instead, the voters selected the Mets' David Wright, who led all NL third basemen with 33 homers and 124 RBIs.

Louisville Slugger's Silver Slugger Award winners are determined by a poll of coaches and managers who vote for the players they felt were the best hitters at each position in both leagues. Selections are based on a combination of statistics, including batting average, on-base percentage and slugging percentage, as well as the coaches' and managers' general impressions of each player's value as a hitter. Managers and coaches are not allowed to vote for players on their own team.

The specially designed Silver Slugger will be presented to each player by a representative of the Hillerich & Bradsby Co., makers of Louisville Slugger, the official bat of Major League Baseball, in a ceremony early next season. The trophy is three feet tall and bears the engraved name of the winner and the other Silver Slugger honorees in his league. The Silver Slugger Award was instituted in 1980.

BY BILL BALLEW

SCHAFER TRYING TO MAKE A CASE THAT HE'S READY TO PLAY CENTER

JORDAN SCHAFER is doing more than making up for lost time. After opening the 2008 season at Double-A Mississippi with a 50-game suspension, the centerfielder has parlayed a torrid finish into a solid start with Navojoa in the Mexican League this off-season.

"The reports we're receiving indicate Jordan is doing very well," said Kurt Kemp, Atlanta's director of player personnel. "His strong conclusion at Mississippi has carried over to his performance in Mexico. He's getting the opportunity to lead off and play center field and getting a great chance to make up for those games he missed early last season."

Rated the Braves' top prospect prior to the 2008 season by ChopTalk and No. 3 in the new rankings, Schafer possesses all the tools to be a center field starter in Atlanta. He batted .323 with six home runs and 20 RBIs in August, with 16 of his 32 hits during the month going for extra bases, to pull his season batting average up to .269. In Mexico, he had nine multi-hit performances in his first 27 games. Schafer posted a four-hit game against Hermosillo on Oct. 17, and recorded 29 hits in his first 105 at-bats for a .276 average.

"Playing in Mexico is a nice step up for Jordan," Kemp said. "He's facing veteran pitchers who really know how to pitch. It's not a fastball-dominated league. Most of the pitchers know how to use their secondary pitches, which makes the situation much more challenging for young hitters."

TOM PRIDDY

Schafer, who recently turned 22 years old, was the Braves' third-round pick in the 2005 draft and led all of minor league baseball with 176 hits in 2007.

SCHAFER'S teammates with Navojoa include rightfielder **Reid Gorecki**, who started the winter 29-for-105 (.276) with three home runs and 18 RBIs, and third baseman **Eric Campbell**, who had eight hits in his first 33 at-bats (.242). Lefthander **Edgar Osuna** is pitching in relief for Hermosillo, posting a 4.26 ERA in his initial 10 games.

The Braves have several other players competing this winter in Venezuela. **Omar Infante** is playing third base for Caribes and had a .265 batting average during his first 14 games. Outfielder **Gregor Blanco** was hitting .302 in his first 43 at-bats with La Guaira, while minor league outfielder **Gorkys Hernandez** was hitting .250 in his first 20 games with Caribes. First baseman **Barbaro Canizares** was batting .309 with two home runs and 11 RBIs in 25 games with Zulia. Pitchers **Jose Ortegano** and **Zach Schreiber** had seen limited work with Caracas. Infielder **Martin Prado** made his debut with Argua on Nov. 11 and had two hits in five at-bats.

In the Dominican Republic, shortstop **Diory Hernandez** had a .339 batting average with five homers and 12 RBIs in 20 games with Escogido. Shortstop **Javier Guzman** hit two home runs on Nov. 8 and owned a .243 average in 10 games with Estrellas. Pitcher **Luis Valdez** was 2-0 with a 3.38 ERA in 10 2/3 innings with Azucareros.

NOTES

- Third baseman **Donell Linares**, who signed with the Braves last summer after defecting from Cuba, was impressive throughout Instructional League. The 25-year-old is a strong right-handed hitter who played for the Cuban national team. He should begin his professional career in the U.S. in 2009 in the middle level of the Braves' farm system.

- The Braves signed Yuma Scorpions shortstop **Ryan Barbas** out of the independent Golden Baseball League in early November. Barbas hit .316 in 72 games in the GBL after the University of New Mexico product spent two years in the Milwaukee farm system.

- The Braves re-signed five minor league free agents, including pitcher **Moises Hernandez**, catchers **J.C. Boscan** and **Jose Camarena** and outfielders **Joe Borchard** and **Reid Gorecki**.

- **Chris Chambliss**, who has served as the Braves' Triple-A hitting coach for the past two seasons, accepted the managerial job of the Charlotte Knights, Triple-A affiliate of the Chicago White Sox. Chambliss also played first base for the Braves from 1980-86.

- Two performances by Braves pitchers were recognized by Minor League Baseball as the best in their respective levels during the past season. **Tommy Hanson**'s season-opening stint versus Wilmington on April 4, during which he fanned 13 batters over five no-hit innings, was named the top showing at the Advanced Class A level. Danville's **David Francis**' six no-hit innings with 16 strikeouts in his third professional start on July 22 was selected the best showing among short-season pitchers. Ironically, Hanson's nine-inning no-hitter with 14 strikeouts against Birmingham on June 25 failed to receive the Double-A recognition.

- Rome manager **Randy Ingle** had his uniform number, 12, retired at his alma mater, Appalachian State University.

2009 FARM SCHEDULES

Gwinnett Braves
International League
Triple A

GWINNETT BRAVES STADIUM
(678) 277-0340
GWINNETTBRAVES.COM

APRIL

9-12	at Charlotte
13-16	at Durham
17-19	Norfolk
20-22	Durham
23-26	Charlotte
28-29	at Norfolk
30	at Pawtucket

MAY

1-3	at Pawtucket
4-7	Syracuse
8-11	Durham
12-15	at Buffalo
16-19	at Louisville
21-24	Toledo
25-28	Indianapolis
29-31	at Syracuse

JUNE

1	at Syracuse
2-5	at Rochester
6-9	Columbus
11-14	Scranton-Wilkes Barre
15-18	at Indianapolis
19-22	at Louisville
23-26	Buffalo
27-30	Louisville

JULY

2-3	at Norfolk
4-6	Norfolk
7-9	at Durham
10-12	at Charlotte
13-15	All-Star Break
16-19	at Scranton-Wilkes Barre
20-23	Norfolk
24-27	Louisville
28-31	Rochester

AUGUST

1-4	at Columbus
6-9	at Toledo
10-13	Durham
14-17	Pawtucket
18-21	at Norfolk
22-24	Charlotte
26-28	at Charlotte
29-31	at Durham

SEPTEMBER

1	at Durham
2-4	at Norfolk
5-7	Charlotte

Mississippi Braves
Southern League
Double A

TRUSTMARK PARK
(888) 272-8374
MISSISSIPPIBRAVES.COM

APRIL

9-13	Carolina
14-18	at Huntsville
20-24	Chattanooga
25-29	at West Tennessee
30	Montgomery

MAY

1-4	Montgomery
5-9	Tennessee
11-15	at Jacksonville
16-20	at Montgomery
21-25	Mobile
26-30	at Birmingham
31	West Tennessee

JUNE

1-4	West Tennessee
5-9	at Mobile
11-15	Birmingham
17-21	at Chattanooga
22-27	Birmingham
28-30	at West Tennessee

JULY

1-3	at West Tennessee
4-7	Jacksonville
8-11	at Birmingham
12-14	All-Star Break
15-19	Huntsville
21-25	at Tennessee
27-31	West Tennessee

AUGUST

1-5	Montgomery
7-11	at Huntsville
12-16	at Montgomery
17-21	Mobile
22-26	at Chattanooga
28-31	West Tennessee

SEPTEMBER

1	West Tennessee
3-7	at Carolina

Myrtle Beach Pelicans
Carolina League
Advanced Class A

BB&T COASTAL FIELD
(877) 918-8499
MYRTLEBEACHPELICANS.COM

APRIL

9-12	Wilmington
13-16	Frederick
17-19	at Potomac
20-22	Kinston
23-26	at Salem
27-29	Lynchburg

MAY

1-3	Salem
4-7	at Lynchburg
8-10	at Kinston
11-14	at Frederick
15-17	Potomac
18-21	at Winston-Salem
22-24	Wilmington
26-28	Winston-Salem
29-31	at Wilmington

JUNE

1-3	at Winston-Salem
4-7	Potomac
9-11	Kinston
12-14	at Salem
15-17	Lynchburg
19-21	Frederick
22-24	All-Star Break
25-27	at Lynchburg
28-30	at Kinston

JULY

1	at Kinston
2-5	Salem
7-9	Potomac
10-12	at Frederick
13-16	at Wilmington
18-20	Winston-Salem
21-23	Wilmington
24-26	at Winston-Salem
27-29	at Potomac
30-31	Kinston

AUGUST

1-2	Kinston
3-5	at Salem
6-9	Lynchburg
11-13	Salem
14-16	at Lynchburg
18-20	at Kinston
21-23	Frederick
24-27	Potomac
28-30	at Frederick
31	at Wilmington

SEPTEMBER

1-2	at Wilmington
4-7	Winston-Salem

Rome Braves
South Atlantic League
Class A

STATE MUTUAL STADIUM
(706) 378-5144
ROMEBRAVES.COM

APRIL

9-12	at Charleston
14-15	Savannah
16-19	Charleston
20-21	at Augusta
22-24	at Savannah
25-27	Augusta
28-30	at Lexington

MAY

1	at Lexington
2-5	Bowling Green
6-9	Lexington
11-14	at Asheville
15-18	at Greenville
20-23	Asheville
24-27	Greenville
29-31	at Bowling Green

JUNE

1	at Bowling Green
2-5	Augusta
6-8	at Charleston
9-11	at Savannah
12-14	Charleston
15-17	Savannah
18-21	at Augusta
22-24	All-Star Break
25-26	at Augusta
27-29	Augusta
30	Bowling Green

JULY

1-3	Bowling Green
4-7	at Lexington
8-11	at Greenville
13-16	Greensboro
17-20	West Virginia
22-25	at Hickory
26-29	at Kannapolis
30-31	Asheville

AUGUST

1-2	Asheville
4-8	Savannah
10-13	at Hagerstown
14-17	at Lake County
19-21	Charleston
22-24	Savannah
25-27	at Charleston
28-30	at Savannah
31	Charleston

SEPTEMBER

1-2	Charleston
3-4	Augusta
5-7	at Augusta

GAME TIMES, BROADCAST INFO TO BE ANNOUNCED.
TENTATIVE; SUBJECT TO CHANGE
FOR SEASON, GROUP AND SUITE TICKET INFORMATION CALL (404) 577-9100

2009 SCHEDULE

APRIL

Braves HOME AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1	2	3	4
5 8:05 PM SEASON OPENER PHI ESPN2	6	7 7:05 PM PHI	8 3:05 PM PHI	9	10 HOME OPENER WSH	11 WSH
12 WSH	13	14 FLA	15 FLA	16 FLA	17 7:05 PM PIT	18 12:35 PM PIT
19 1:35 PM PIT	20 7:05 PM WSH	21 7:05 PM WSH	22 7:05 PM WSH	23	24 7:10 PM CIN	25 1:10 PM CIN
26 1:10 PM CIN	27 STL	28 STL	29 STL	30		

MAY

Braves HOME AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1 HOU	2 HOU
3 HOU	4 NYM	5 NYM	6 FLA	7 FLA	8 7:05 PM PHI	9 7:05 PM PHI
10 1:35 PM PHI	11 7:10 PM NYM	12 7:10 PM NYM	13 1:10 PM NYM	14	15 ARI	16 ARI
17 ARI	18 COL	19 COL	20 COL	21 COL	22 TOR	23 TOR
24 TOR	25 4:05 PM SF	26 10:15 PM SF	27 10:15 PM SF	28 ARI	29 ARI	30 ARI
31 ARI						

JUNE

Braves HOME AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1	2 CHC	3 CHC	4 CHC	5 MIL	6 MIL
7 MIL	8 PIT	9 PIT	10 PIT	11 PIT	12 7:05 PM BAL	13 7:05 PM BAL
14 1:35 PM BAL	15	16 7:10 PM CIN	17 7:10 PM CIN	18 12:35 PM CIN	19 BOS	20 BOS
21 BOS	22	23 NYY	24 NYY	25 NYY	26 BOS	27 BOS
28 BOS	29	30 PHI				

2009 SCHEDULE

JULY

Braves — HOME — AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1 PHI	2 PHI	3 7:05 PM WAS	4 WAS
5 1:35 PM WAS	6 CHI	7 CHI	8 CHI	9 COL	10 COL	11 COL
12 COL	13	14 ST. LOUIS ALL-STAR GAME	15	16 NYM	17 MYM	18 NYM
19 NYM	20 SF	21 SF	22 SF	23 SF	24 8:05 PM MIL	25 7:05 PM MIL
26 2:05 PM MIL	27	28 FLA	29 FLA	30 FLA	31 LA	

AUGUST

Braves — HOME — AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
						1 LA
2 LA	3 SD	4 SD	5 SD	6 10:10 PM LA	7 10:10 PM LA	8 LA
9 LA	10	11 WAS	12 WAS	13	14 PHI	15 PHI
16 PHI	17	18 7:10 PM NYM	19 7:10 PM NYM	20 7:10 PM NYM	21 FLA	22 FLA
23 FLA	24	25 SD	26 SD	27 SD	28 PHI	29 7:05 PM PHI
30 1:35 PM PHI	31 FLA					

SEPT./OCT.

Braves — HOME — AWAY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
		1 FLA	2 FLA	3 FLA	4 CIN	5 CIN
6 CIN	7	8 HOU	9 HOU	10 HOU	11 8:15 PM STL	12 7:15 PM STL
13 2:15 PM STL	14	15 NYM	16 NYM	17 NYM	18 PHI	19 PHI
20 PHI	21 7:10 PM NYM	22 7:10 PM NYM	23 7:10 PM NYM	24	25 7:05 PM WAS	26 1:05 PM WAS
27 1:35 PM WAS	28 FLA	29 FLA	30 FLA	1 WAS	2 WAS	3 WAS
4 WAS						

HOLIDAY GIFT PACK DEADLINE DEC. 15

The Braves have a 6-game ticket package on sale that includes the 2009 season opener and interleague games against the Red Sox and Yankees. Tickets (2 tickets to 6 games) are for Opening Day, one Red Sox game, one Yankees game, and three other pre-selected games.

The Holiday Six-Game Gift Pack is available through Dec. 15 online at braves.com/holidays or by phone at (404) 577-9100. The package is available for as low as $152. The interleague series with the Yankees is June 23-25, when the Bronx Bombers make their first trip to Atlanta since 2000. The Boston series follows June 26-28.

Purchases include gift box, gift wrap, holiday card and a replica Braves cap.

SEASON TICKETS DISCOUNT

Season tickets are on sale, and the Braves are offering something new for budget-conscious fans. An Upper Box full season ticket behind home plate is just $415 - $5 per game (gate price $12-$16).

Call (404) 577-9100 or visit braves.com for information on all season ticket plans, including half-season, weekend plans, 20-game plans, and season parking. Reservations and deposits also are being accepted for group ticket purchases.

At press time, no information had been announced on individual game tickets.

MUSEUM & TOUR INFO

The Ivan Allen Jr. Braves Museum features more than 500 Braves artifacts that trace the team's history from its beginnings in Boston (1871-1952) to Milwaukee (1953-65) to Atlanta (1966-present). It is located on the northwest side of Turner Field at aisle 134. The museum opens two and a half hours before each game and closes in the middle of the seventh inning. The museum is open year-round and is the starting point of one-hour guided tours of Turner Field. Tours leave on the hour.

Tour reservations are not necessary for individuals or groups of less than 20 people. Tickets can be purchased the day of the tour at the main ticket window. Free parking in the Green lot.

Admission to the museum during games is one token ($2) and $5 on non-game days. Tour tickets are $12 for adults, $7 for children and $10 for groups of 20 or more. Walk-up tickets can be purchased at the ticket window. Groups of 20 or more and school groups must make reservations two weeks in advance by calling (404) 614-2311.

HOURS OF OPERATION

OCTOBER - MARCH	
Monday - Saturday	10 a.m. - 2 p.m.
DEC. 23-JAN. 3	CLOSED
APRIL - OCTOBER	
Monday - Saturday	9 a.m. - 3 p.m.
Sunday	1 - 3 p.m.

TOUR TICKETS

ADULTS	$12
CHILDREN 13 and Under	$7
MILITARY	$7
GROUP	$10

SCHOOL GROUP PRICES

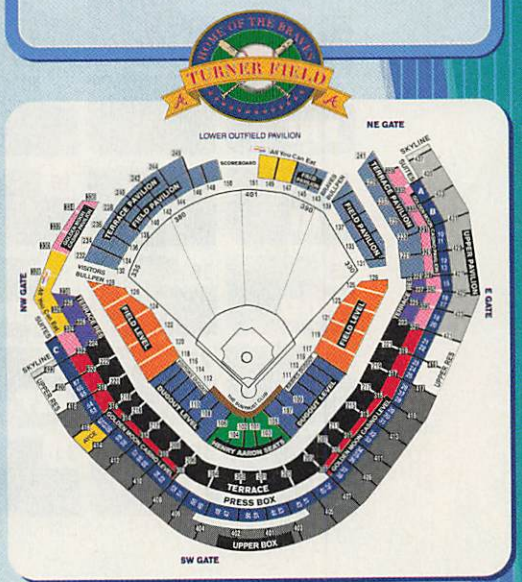
CHILDREN	$5
ADULTS	$7

*Subject to change
Tours not available when the Braves have afternoon home games

GIVE A GIFT CARD

Braves Gift Cards are available in denominations from $25 to $250 and can be used to purchase Tickets, Concessions and Merchandise.

To purchase Gift Cards or to obtain more information, visit Braves.com or the Braves Clubhouse Store at CNN Center (call 404-523-5854).



SPRING TRAINING 2009

ATLANTA

Individual game ticket information and the Braves' spring training schedule at Disney's Wide World of Sports were not available at press time. However, a tentative, unofficial schedule showed perhaps the best lineup of exhibition games the Braves have had since they started training at Disney in 1997. It included two games with the Yankees, two against the Mets, two against the World Champion Phillies and one game against the Red Sox.

The Braves are marketing Spring Training Travel Packages on their web site at braves.com, and four specific dates at 9,500-seat Champion Stadium at Disney's Wide World of Sports are:

March 4 - Yankees
Mar. 8 - Phillies
Mar. 17 - Mets
Mar. 30 - Red Sox

The tentative schedule for Braves exhibitions at Disney includes 16 games against major league competition. There is a 17th date for the World Baseball Classic, and there is no game scheduled against a college opponent. This schedule is unofficial and subject to change. Times to be determined.

For more information on the travel packages that include game tickets and to book online, visit braves.com.

Individual tickets normally go on sale in early January at Disney's Wide World of Sports box office and through Ticketmaster and Ticketmaster.com.

Disney's Wide World of Sports is located just southwest of Orlando in Lake Buena Vista, Fla.

Call (407) 939-GAME (4263) for additional information, including details on season and group tickets, or visit disneysports.com/atlantabraves.

GAME TIMES, BROADCAST INFO TO BE ANNOUNCED.
TENTATIVE/UNOFFICIAL; SUBJECT TO CHANGE; ALL GAMES @ CHAMPION STADIUM, DISNEY'S WIDE WORLD OF SPORTS

FEB/MARCH

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			25	26 HOU	27	28
1 PHI	2	3	4 NYY	5 *WBC	6 HOU	7
8 PHI	9	10	11	12 WAS	13	14
15 HOU	16	17 NYM	18	19 DET	20 FLA	21 NYM
22	23	24 PIT	25	26 TOR	27 DET	28 NYY
29	30 BOS	31				

*WBC (World Baseball Classic)

STAT PARADE 2008

STARTS BY POSITION

1B	Teixeira 102, Kotchman 40, Prado 14, Norton 6.
2B	Johnson 135, Prado 15, Infante 9, Gotay 3.
3B	C. Jones 115, Infante 26, Prado 15, Gotay 6.
SS	Escobar 126, Lillibridge 20, Infante 15, Prado 1.
LF	Blanco 55, Diaz 33, B. Jones 27, Infante 26, Norton 15, Anderson 3, Prado 3.
CF	Kotsay 80, Blanco 54, Anderson 27, Infante 1.
RF	Francoeur 151, Blanco 4, Perry 3, B. Jones 3, Norton 1.
C	McCann 132, Miller 17, Sammons 13.
P	Jurrjens 31, Campillo 25, Hudson 22, Reyes 22, Morton 15, Glavine 13, Hampton 13, James 7, Smoltz 5, Parr 5, Bennett 4.
DH	Norton 5, C. Jones 3, Teixeira 1.

STARTS BY BATTING ORDER (117 DIFFERENT LINEUPS)

1	Blanco 60, Escobar 38, Johnson 28, Anderson 23, Infante 7, Prado 6.
2	Escobar 73, Johnson 38, Prado 20, Kotsay 16, Infante 7, Gotay 4, Blanco 4.
3	C. Jones 118, Johnson 17, Kotchman 5, Kotsay 5, Francoeur 4, Teixeira 4, Escobar 4, Prado 3, McCann 1, Norton 1.
4	Teixeira 99, McCann 43, Infante 10, Kotchman 4, Norton 2, Kotsay 2, Johnson 1, Francoeur 1.
5	McCann 63, Infante 29, Francoeur 29, Kotchman 12, Escobar 11, Norton 8, Johnson 5, Kotsay 4, Prado 1.
6	Francoeur 69, McCann 24, Johnson 16, Kotchman 15, Infante 12, Diaz 8, Norton 6, Kotsay 6, Prado 5, B. Jones 1.
7	Francoeur 40, Kotsay 30, Johnson 20, Diaz 19, Norton 10, B. Jones 9, Blanco 8, Prado 6, Infante 4, Kotchman 4, Miller 3, Sammons 3, Lillibridge 3, Gotay 2, McCann 1.
8	Blanco 36, B. Jones 19, Kotsay 17, Lillibridge 15, Miller 13, Johnson 10, Sammons 10, Infante 8, Francoeur 8, Anderson 7, Prado 7, Diaz 6, Gotay 3, Perry 3.
9	Jurrjens 30, Campillo 24, Hudson 20, Reyes 19, Glavine 13, Morton 13, Hampton 13, James 7, Smoltz 5, Blanco 5, Parr 5, Bennett 4, Lillibridge 2, Miller 1, B. Jones 1.

2-OUT RBIS

McCann	34
Teixeira	33
Escobar	25
Francoeur	24
Johnson	21
C. Jones	18
Prado	15
Blanco	13

GRAND SLAMS

McCann	1
Johnson	1

LEADOFF HOMERS

Escobar	2
Anderson	2

MULTI-HOMER GAMES

C. Jones	2
McCann	2
Teixeira	2
Francoeur	1
Johnson	1
Anderson	1

PINCH-HIT HOME RUNS

Norton	3
Gotay	1
Johnson	1
Miller	1
Prado	1
C. Jones	1

MULTI-HIT GAMES

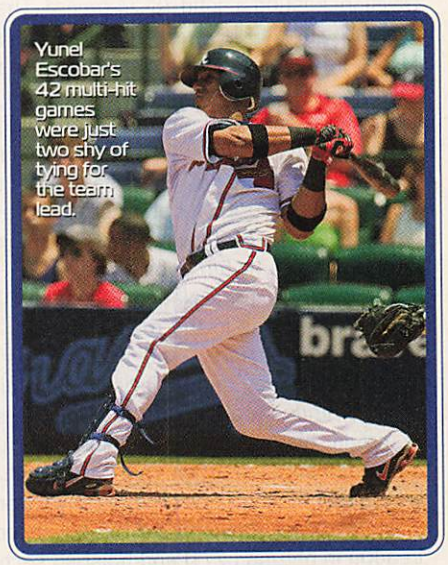
C. Jones	44
McCann	44
Johnson	44
Escobar	42
Francoeur	35
Teixeira	31
Blanco	28
Kotsay	24
Prado	23

MULTI-RBI GAMES

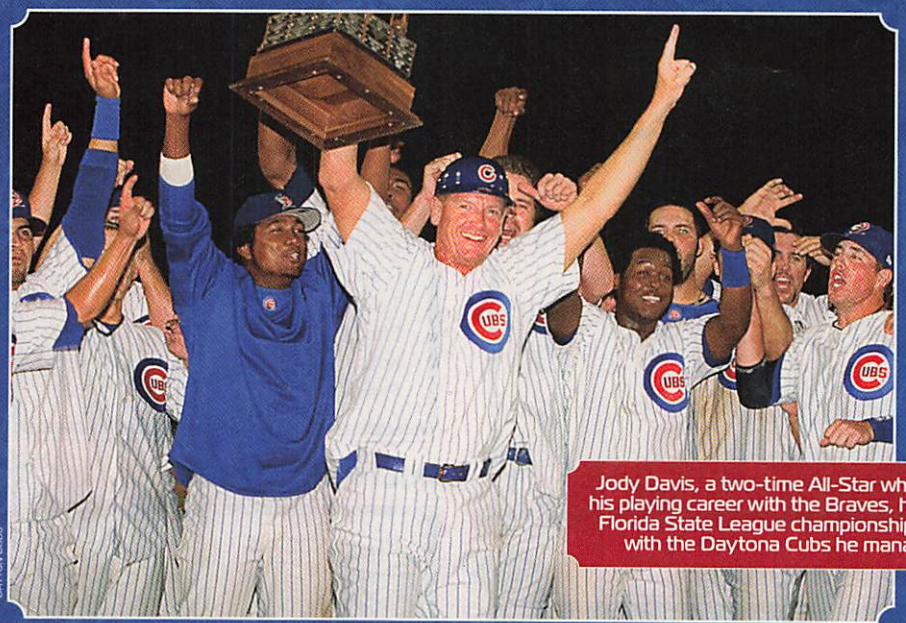
McCann	21
Teixeira	20
Johnson	18
Francoeur	17
Escobar	16
C. Jones	15
Norton	11

LONGEST HITTING STREAKS GAMES, AVG.

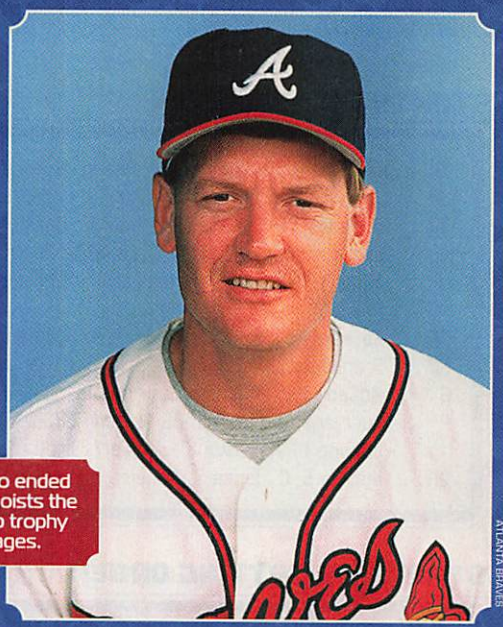
Johnson	22	.402 (35-87)
C. Jones	13	.469 (23-49)
Johnson	13	.388 (19-49)
McCann	13	.392 (20-51)
Escobar	12	.327 (16-49)
C. Jones	11	.457 (16-35)
Escobar	11	.386 (17-44)
C. Jones	10	.333 (12-36)
C. Jones	10	.351 (13-37)



Yunel Escobar's 42 multi-hit games were just two shy of tying for the team lead.



Jody Davis, a two-time All-Star who ended his playing career with the Braves, hoists the Florida State League championship trophy with the Daytona Cubs he manages.



CATCHER ON THE RISE

Jody Davis Chalks Up First Championship As Manager In Cubs System

BY BRIAN KNAPP

JODY DAVIS FELT LIKE A KID again when he hoisted the Florida State League championship trophy skyward on Sept. 9 at Jackie Robinson Ballpark in Daytona Beach, Fla. The 52-year-old former Braves catcher (1988-90) managed the Daytona Cubs to 12 wins in their final 16 games, the last of which gave them their first league title since 2000.

In the afterglow, players huddled around Davis and chanted his name after Florida State League president Chuck Murphy presented them with their trophy. The team reached the playoffs as the second-half champion of the East Division, posting a solid 38-24 record. The Cubs won a best-of-five series from Minnesota affiliate Fort Myers in four games to complete their march to the top.

"In the second half of the season, we had some guys moving up, and the team chemistry clicked with two months to go," Davis said. "A lot of the guys we had were successful at other levels, and we started to believe we could win it. We got a lot more confident, and it was awfully fun to be a part of."

Davis, a two-time National League All-Star (1984, '86) who spent 10 seasons in the major leagues, witnessed such camaraderie once before – as the starting catcher for the 1984 National League Eastern Division champion Chicago Cubs.

"It reminded me a lot of the '84 Cubs team," said Davis, quick to credit his assistant coaches. "We were really close and depended on each other. That's really what you try to develop as a manager. It wasn't just me, by any means."

Under Davis, Daytona led the advanced Class A Florida State League in batting (.271) and finished second in earned run average (3.51). The recipe for success was simple, and the manager's impeccable guidance served as the driving force behind Daytona's run, according to the team's general manager, Bill Papierniak.

"Our championship was, in no small part, due to the great leadership Jody provided to the guys on our team," Papierniak said. "He not only prepared them to play to their potential, but was the heart of this ballclub throughout the year."

Davis - whose playing career ended at a time when many of his current players were just entering grade school - loves the player development side of his job, though it can be bittersweet at the minor league level.

"I think the biggest joy you get from it is watching kids progress," he said. "A lot of these guys have never played a long season before. It's always sad... by the time they're playing well, you end up sending them up."

His managerial stock on the rise, Davis has compiled a 205-203 mark since he debuted on the bench with Class A Peoria in 2006. He has designs on returning to the major leagues as a coach or manager, and while he spent the last two seasons in Daytona, Davis remains uncertain on where he will land next.

"It's up in the air," said Davis, who also managed for one season in an independent Canadian league. "I at least want to get back to the big leagues as a coach. The itch is still there. The right opportunity's out there somewhere for me."

His experience as a player, including the time he spent in Atlanta, can only further his cause. Acquired by the Braves in a September 1988 trade that sent pitchers Kevin Coffman and

Kevin Blankenship to the Cubs, Davis spent parts of three seasons (1988-90) in Atlanta. By then, however, the Gainesville, Georgia, native's best days were behind him, and distractions close to home kept him preoccupied.

"It was the first time in 13 years I'd been home in the summertime," Davis said. "It probably really hurt me as a player being at home. I'd try to go fishing or hunting before games, things like that. I really enjoyed Atlanta."

Years of everyday catching had already taken their toll when Davis joined the Braves, and his hitting production sagged. He hit just .161 in 92 games for Atlanta before being released during the 1990 season. Davis signed briefly with the Detroit Tigers but called it a career soon after with a career batting average of .245 and 127 home runs.

"My mind was telling my body it had to get things done that I couldn't do," he said. "Things I could do in the past I couldn't do anymore. I probably could have hung on for two or three years as a backup."

Selected by the Cubs in the 1980 Rule V draft from the Mets (who took him in the third round of the 1976 amateur draft), Davis enjoyed his best years in Chicago. He came into his own in 1983, when he set career-highs in games (151), hits (138), doubles (31), home runs (24) and batting average (.271). Though the Cubs lost to the Padres in the 1984 NLCS, Davis, who had a career-best 94 RBIs in the regular season, batted .389 with two home runs in the five games.

One of the league's most durable catchers – he averaged 141 games between 1982 and 1987 – Davis, in 1986, became the first Cubs catcher since Randy Hundley (1967) to win a Gold Glove award. However, his durability likely cut years off his career.

"I was a foot too short and about 15-20 years too early, but I had a lot of fun," Davis said. "When I was playing, people were telling me I should take more days off, and maybe I should have. But I played as hard as I could for as long as I could."

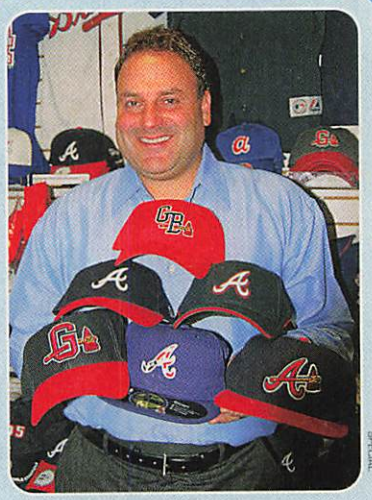
Davis now resides north of Atlanta in his hometown of Gainesville, with his wife of 12 years, Penny. He has three children, ages 27, 26 and 22, from a previous marriage. Life has treated him well.

"I'm in good shape," he said. "My left knee's not perfect from all the catching, but I still get around okay."

HOW I MADE IT TO THE MAJORS

STEVE GOFF

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF MERCHANDISING



BY STEVE FALL

WHILE MOST PEOPLE focus on the ballgame at Turner Field, Steve Goff has something else on his mind.

"I kid people all the time. When I go to the Braves game, I'm probably looking to see what people are wearing more than watching the game," said Goff.

As the club's assistant director of merchandising, nothing makes Goff happier than to see the crowd decked out in Braves apparel. He enjoys the product development part of his job. He pays close attention to what children and adults wear to help him think of new items for the team's stores and catalogs.

"I like to get involved in taking all of our logos and coming up with different looks," said Goff. "I may look at 100 different t-shirts with Nike, but only buy 15 from them. There is a lot behind the scenes that goes into the final decision."

Goff travels to meet with apparel companies like Nike, New Era and Majestic. Along with buyers from the other Major League teams, they discuss new ideas and designs.

"I work with vendors and artists with these companies," said Goff, who started with the Braves in 1981. "Vendors have some ideas, I have some ideas. We put some stuff down on paper, turn it into artwork, and from there, it goes to a sample. Then it goes to production."

Since he orders about 80 percent of the inventory eight-to-10 months in advance, Goff needs to estimate things like how many Chipper Jones jerseys will sell during the season. He usually goes by the previous year's numbers. But in the unpredictable world of baseball, it's impossible to know what players might get traded, potentially leaving behind unsold merchandise. The merchandising department runs the Braves Clubhouse Store at CNN Center, and they produce two mail order catalogs each year.

When he was five years old, Goff moved to Georgia from West Virginia with his family. He became a huge fan of the Braves and Hank Aaron. He seized an opportunity when his college roommate worked on the Braves grounds crew. He applied for such a position in 1981, but worked first as an usher. He returned the following summer and joined the grounds crew. The next year he also landed a job packing and shipping club merchandise orders.

A couple of years after he started with the team, Goff ran the minor league clubhouse at spring training in West Palm Beach, Florida. For four years, he would spend six weeks in spring training and then return to Atlanta. There he worked days in the merchandising department and assisted the grounds crew at night, logging 16-hour days. All the hard work paid off in the late 1980s. Goff received a promotion to merchandise manager. Then in the early 1990s, he moved into his current job.

"Don't be afraid to start in the minor leagues," said Goff, suggesting an approach to break into baseball. "A lot of people, early on with the Braves, were promoted out of the minor leagues. If you can get a job, go and work a couple of years and then pay attention to the openings. Go in and bust your butt and let some people see what you can do."

Goff personally found that patience pays off.

"I just stuck it out. I waited my five or six years, and my break came."

ALUMNI NOTES

Greg Maddux (RHP, 1993-2003) reportedly told the Dodgers he does not plan to pitch next year, and his agent, Scott Boras, said during the general managers meetings Nov. 3 that Maddux plans to retire. Maddux won his 18th Gold Glove in the last 19 seasons, including the last five in a row.

Marquis Grissom (CF, 1995-96) was named first base coach by the Washington Nationals.

Dale Murphy (OF/C/1B1976-90) will be keynote speaker at the 8th annual American Baseball Leadoff Dinner in Birmingham, Ala., Jan. 29 at 6:30 p.m. at The Club. The ABF promotes baseball fundamentals and injury prevention, as well as academics and reading enrichment. For ticket info, contact David Osinski at (205) 558-4235 or e-mail abf@asmi.org. Visit americanbaseball.org.

The Yankees traded **Wilson Betemit** (INF, 2001, '04-06) to the White Sox in a deal for Nick Swisher.

Oakland declined to pick up the option on **Alan Embree** (LHP, 1997-98).

Pete Orr (INF, 2005-07) refused an outright assignment by the Nationals and became a free agent.

The Nationals outrighted **Ryan Langerhans** (OF, 2002, '05-07) to Syracuse.

The Dodgers named **Damon Berryhill** (C, 1991-93) manager of their short-season Class-A team at Ogden, Utah. He managed in the Texas Rangers organization last year.

The Cubs declined to pick up their contract option on **Henry Blanco** (C, 2002-03).

The Padres hired **Ted Simmons** (1B/C/3B, 1986-88) as bench coach.

Kansas City added **Brayan Pena** (C, 2005-08) to their 40-man roster.

The Nationals hired **Pat Corrales** (Coach, 1990-2006) as special consultant to the senior VP and GM after firing him as bench coach.

Marcus Giles (2B, 2001-06), who was released by the Rockies out of spring training last year, reportedly will try a comeback, according to his agent.

The Marlins claimed **Dan Meyer** (LHP, 2004) off waivers from Oakland. He was the Braves' first-round draft pick in 2002 who was traded to Oakland in the Tim Hudson deal.

Ken Oberkfell (INF, 1984-88), who became the Mets' first base coach under Jerry Manuel after Willie Randolph was fired last season, was reassigned by the team.

Seattle righthander R.A. Dickey, a converted knuckleball pitcher, said he plans to meet with **Phil Niekro** (RHP, 1964-83, '87) in Atlanta this off-season to get pointers on throwing the pitch.

Hank Aaron (OF/1B, 1954-74) will be the guest speaker at the annual Joshua and Tyler Yoder Scholarship Foundation dinner and auction Mar. 6 at Signature of Solon country club in Cleveland, Ohio. The Yoder brothers were killed in separate traffic accidents weeks after their high school graduation - Josh in 1996 and Tyler in 2003. For information, visit yoderbrothersfoundation.org.

Phil Niekro (RHP, 1964-83, '87) was among the golfers in the first Fisk & Friends Celebrity Classic Nov. 7-8 at the Founders Club in Sarasota, Fla., to benefit the Florida Center for Child and Family Development.

Gary Matthews (OF, 1977-80), now a broadcaster for the Phillies, reportedly is among the friends that president-elect Barack Obama has in baseball. Obama is a White Sox fan, and Matthews played four seasons in Chicago with the Cubs.

Howie Bedell (OF, 1962) is heading a group trying to find a Class-A team to play in Chester County, Pa.

BIRTHDAYS

DECEMBER

1ST	GREG MCMICHAEL (42)
	REGGIE SANDERS (41)
2ND	ADRIAN DEVINE (57)
	STEVE SISCO (39)
	PETER MOYLAN (30)
	MARK KOTSAY (33)
3RD	DAVE EILERS (72)
	DAMON BERRYHILL (45)
	PAUL BYRD (38)
	MATT CHILDERS (30)
4TH	LEE BALES (64)
	ALEXIS INFANTE (47)
5TH	GARY ROENICKE (54)
	GERMAN JIMENEZ (46)
6TH	FREDDIE VELAZQUEZ (71)
	AMADO SAMUEL (70)
	ARNOLD UMBACH (66)
	STEVE BEDROSIAN (51)
7TH	OZZIE VIRGIL (52)
8TH	JOHN MIZEROCK (48)
9TH	ED ROMERO (51)
	TONY TARASCO (38)
10TH	BOB ROSELLI (77)
	BOB PRIDDY (69)
	PAUL ASSENMACHER (48)
	BRANDON JONES (25)
11TH	JOHNNY O'BRIEN (78)
12TH	RALPH GARR (63)
	GREGOR BLANCO (25)
13TH	MIKE MORDECAI (41)
16TH	NEIL CHRISLEY (77)
17TH	CURTIS PRIDE (40)
	MIKE CATHER (38)
18TH	GINO CIMOLI (79)
	JIM CLANCY (53)
	CHRIS SEELBACH (36)
19TH	JOE SLUSARSKI (42)
	RAFAEL SORIANO (29)
20TH	MARC VALDES (37)
21ST	BOB RUSH (83)
	JACK DANIELS (81)
	PAUL CASANOVA (67)
	ROGER McDOWELL (48)
	BUDDY CARLYLE (31)
	ROYCE RING (28)
22ND	ALEX MONCHAK (89)
	LONNIE SMITH (53)
	GARY COOPER (52)
	DAVID NIED (40)
23RD	DAVE MAY (65)
	PASCUAL MATOS (34)
24TH	KEVIN MILLWOOD (34)
25TH	DICK MANVILLE (82)
	RUBEN GOTAY (26)
26TH	STU MILLER (81)
	WAYNE CAUSEY (72)
	JOHN BRAUN (69)
	RAY SADECKI (68)
	CHRIS CHAMBLISS (60)
	CHARLES THOMAS (30)
	OMAR INFANTE (27)
28TH	DON THOMPSON (85)
	STEVE KUCZEK (84)
	ZANE SMITH (48)
	MELVIN NIEVES (37)
29TH	ROD NICHOLS (44)
	JARET WRIGHT (33)
	JIM BROWER (36)
30TH	FRANK TORRE (77)
31ST	SAM MCCONNELL (33)
	CHRIS REITSMA (31)

ChopTalk
THE OFFICIAL MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF THE ATLANTA BRAVES

SUBSCRIPTIONS
P.O. Box 80750
Conyers, Ga. 30013-8750
PHONE | 1-877-655-CHOP (2467)
WEB | Braves.com/choptalk

PUBLISHER
GARY CARUSO, President
Wonderdog Publishing, Inc.

EDITORIAL
EDITOR: Gary Caruso
COLUMNISTS: Jay Busbee, Bobby Cox, Casey Kotchman, Patty Rasmussen, Ken Rosenthal (FoxSports.com), Frank Wren
REPORTERS: Bill Ballew, Jay Busbee, Jon Cooper, Steve Fall, Ray Glier, Brian Knapp, Ryan McNally, Patty Rasmussen, Jon Ross
PHOTOGRAPHERS: Paul Abell, Patty Rasmussen, Carlos Restrepo, Bill Setliff, Allison Shirreffs, Walter Victor, Rodger Wood
CARTOONIST: Johnny Sajem

PRODUCTION
ART DIRECTOR: Clark Odom

ADVERTISING
SALES:
Scott Rickles 800-929-4098
Dan Tomkiewicz 770-640-1681
FLORIDA SALES
Carmel Modica 850-231-3146

PRINTER
Publisher's Press

SUBSCRIBER SERVICES
McMillen Communications

NEWSSTAND OPERATIONS
Curtis Circulation Company
Publishers Single Copy Sales Services

BUSINESS OPERATIONS
Rob Calcutta

CHANGE OF ADDRESS
Send address changes or corrections to: ChopTalk, P.O. Box 80750, Conyers, Ga. 30013-8750 or call 1-877-655-CHOP (2467) or visit braves.com/choptalk.

OFFICE OF PUBLICATION
12829 Trinity Dr.
Stafford, TX 77477-4214
PHONE 1-877-655-CHOP (2467)
E-MAIL Letters@ChopTalkonline.com

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY
It is the policy of this magazine and its publisher:
1. To contract with individuals on the basis of their qualifications and with assurance of equal opportunity and treatment,regardless of race, color, creed, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, national origin or handicap.
2. To not knowingly accept any advertisement which implies any preference, limitation or discrimination based on race, color, creed, gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, national origin or handicap.

ATLANTA BRAVES STAFF
PUBLIC RELATIONS
BRAD HAINJE - Director of MediaRelations
BETH MARSHALL - Director of Public Relations
ANDY PRESSLEY - Publications Manager
Adam Liberman, Meagan Swingle, Adrienne Midgley

GARY CARUSO

EDITOR & PUBLISHER

KNUCKLING DOWN

PHIL NIEKRO is one of the greatest ambassadors the Braves, baseball, and the knuckleball - not necessarily in that order - have ever had. A great pitcher and a great gentleman, he's always on call to serve the Braves, numerous charitable organizations, his family and friends, and even the National Baseball Hall of Fame.

"Knucksie" isn't just a Hall of Famer... He's also a member of the Hall of Fame's board of directors, one of six former players to sit on the 18-member governing body of the Cooperstown shrine.

At age 69, Niekro always seems to be on the go - playing in charitable golf tournaments, making speeches and appearances, participating in the Hall of Fame's annual fantasy camp, attending board meetings, helping to open a new baseball facility for disabled children near his home north of Atlanta, appearing at Turner Field whenever the Braves need him, and helping to coach and inspire younger Braves during spring training.

This year, Niekro will have a special mission when the Braves convene at Disney's Wide World of Sports. In fact, it couldn't get much more special for Knucksie, because this assignment combines three of his greatest loves - his family, the Braves and the incredible pitch that carried him from coal miner's son to baseball immortality.

If all goes well, perhaps the Braves someday will have another Niekro on the mound, baffling hitters with the most perplexing of all pitches to hit - and to throw.

Lance Niekro, Phil's nephew and the son of the late Joe Niekro, himself a former Brave (1973-74) and a legendary knuckleball artist, has been invited to minor league camp to re-launch his career as a professional ballplayer in his father's and uncle's large footsteps as a knuckleball pitcher.

You might remember that just a few years ago, Lance was an up-and-coming first baseman with the San Francisco Giants. In 2005, at age 26, he hit .252 with 12 home runs and 46 RBIs in just 278 at-bats in the same lineup as that Bonds guy. His future looked bright.

However, 2006 wasn't quite as good as '05 on the field, and then in October, Lance's world fell apart. Joe, his father, died suddenly at age 61 of a cerebral brain aneurysm. Lance appeared in only 11 games for the Giants in 2007 and was out of baseball last year.

"After Joe died, Lance was really messed up for a while," Phil said. "A few months ago, he got things figured out and got his head straight. He said he wanted to get back in baseball and that he wanted to do it as a knuckleball pitcher. His dad taught him the knuckleball, and he's got a good one.

"Getting guys out in a game is different, though. He has to learn the mental, as well as the physical approach and demeanor of becoming a knuckleball pitcher. And that's what we'll go through in spring training. He knows this might be his last shot, and he really wants it. That's what's important."

Even more important is that Lance will have the consummate knuckleball artist at his side - and on call at a moment's notice.

"We were made aware of the situation by Phil, and we have enough information to know that Lance clearly has a good knuckleball," said Frank Wren. "It's worth the chance to see if it could happen. If we didn't have access to Phil, it probably wouldn't make a lot of sense for us, because it's such a specialty pitch. But with The Master to teach him, it's a perfect situation."

Wren says the Braves are prepared to be patient with Lance, perhaps even leaving him in extended spring training before assigning him to a farm club. But Lance already has 195 games of major league experience under his belt. He knows his way around.

In some ways, he's more advanced than Boston's Tim Wakefield was at the same stage. Wakefield started his pro career as a corner infielder, too, but didn't make it to the majors until he learned to be a knuckleball pitcher. Lance has played in the majors, and he's had top-notch knuckleball instruction - with much more to come.

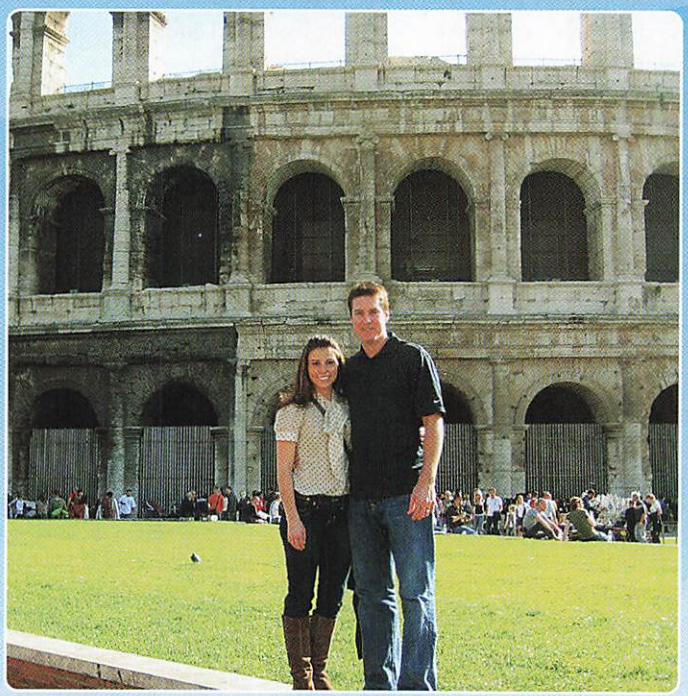
THIS ISSUE OF CHOPTALK was mailed Nov. 25. The January issue will be mailed Dec. 19.

BEYOND BASEBALL

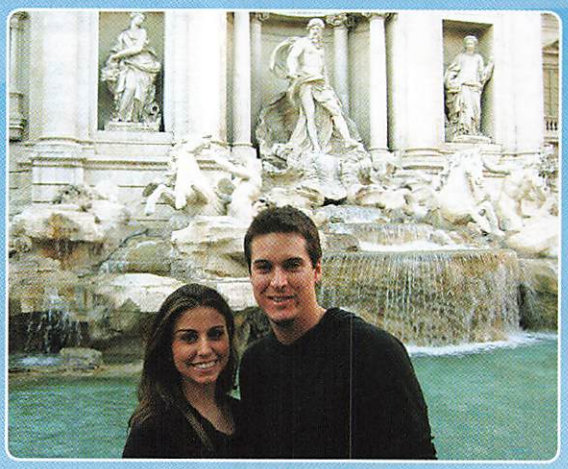
BY **PATTY RASMUSSEN**

Kelly and Lauren Johnson spent two weeks in Italy, seeing such famous landmarks in Rome as The Colosseum (L) and the Trevi Fountain.

ITALY FOR TWO



PHOTOS: SPECIAL



LAUREN JOHNSON, wife of **Kelly Johnson**, described their two-week trip to Italy in October as, "by far the best vacation we could have imagined. The food was amazing. We fell in love with the homemade pasta." The couple visited Venice, Cinque Terra, Cortona, and drove around the Tuscan and Umbrian regions of Italy before ending their trip with three full days and nights in Rome. In addition to the usual sites of Rome, Kelly and Lauren had an unforgettable private tour through the Vatican and St. Peter's Basilica.

TIM AND KIM HUDSON were once again the honorary chairs of the Celebration of Wishes Gala, held Nov. 8 at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Buckhead. The event benefits the Make a Wish Foundation of Georgia and Alabama. **Blaine** and **Ginsey Boyer** were among the guests. The highlight of the evening was the "Wish World Newscast" featuring **Evan**, a 7-year-old Wish child, co-hosting a mock television news program with emcee **Bill Gaines**, a news anchor with the local CBS affiliate. The live auction once again featured an American Idol finale trip, airfare, hotel and show tickets, and this year the package was bought by the Hudsons and Boyers. Kim and Ginsey will make the trip to Los Angeles in late May for the American Idol finale...

SPECIAL

The fish never had a chance against this crew of (L-R) Andruw Jones, Adam LaRoche, Tim Hudson and Jeff Francoeur.

A group of players and their wives joined **Tim** and **Kim Hudson** in Costa Rica for a week in early October. Kim said it rained almost every day of the trip, but that didn't dampen the vacation spirit. They were still able to do the things they'd hoped to do - zip line tree top tour, mud baths, fishing - and it was a relaxing time for everyone. Among the guests were **Jeff Francoeur** and his wife, **Catie**, and **Greg Norton** and wife, **Jaena**, and former Braves **Andruw Jones**, with wife, **Nicole**, and **Adam LaRoche** and his wife, **Jenn**...

Brian and **Ashley McCann** spent a week in early October at the Atlantis Resort in the Bahamas, but when Brian returned home, he began a rigorous diet and exercise program, monitoring everything he eats and adding more running to his workout. "I was sorer than ever at the end of this season," said McCann. "I was close to 245 pounds, and my knees were taking a beating." By mid-November, seven weeks after making the lifestyle change, McCann reported he'd lost between 15 and 20 pounds. He credited his brother, **Brad**, with helping him stick to his diet and exercise regimen. "He's doing it with me, so that helps a lot," McCann said. "I feel better than I've ever felt."...

Jeff and **Catie Francoeur** celebrated their first wedding anniversary enjoying a day and night at the Four Seasons Hotel in downtown Atlanta, including a romantic dinner at

Bone's Restaurant, an elegant Buckhead steakhouse. The Francoeurs decided not to take a planned trip to New Zealand, due to Jeff's workout schedule, but they're still on for a family ski trip to Vail, Colorado, in December...

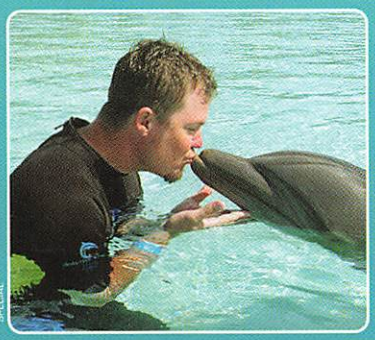
Blaine Boyer surprised his wife, **Ginsey**, with a trip to New York at the end of October. "It was a huge surprise!" said Ginsey. "He told me the night before to pack my bags and that we were flying out at 8:30 the next morning. I had no idea where we were going until we got to the airport!" Ginsey said they got to do all the "cheesy, touristy stuff" they don't have time for during the season. "We went to see 'Wicked', ice skated at Rockefeller Center, and checked out Wall Street, on Blaine's list of things to do," she said. "We ate at some awesome restaurants, and best of all, we stayed at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel. We were only there for a few days, but it was a blast!" The down side to the trip occurred on the way to the airport when Ginsey left her camera, filled with cheesy, touristy pictures, in the cab. It was, sadly, not returned...

Braves Hall of Fame broadcaster **Ernie Johnson** and his wife, **Lois**, attended the 70th birthday celebration for **Ted Turner**, former owner (and manager) of the Braves. **Paula Caray**, wife of the late **Skip Caray**, also attended with her good friend, **Michelle Zarzaca**. The party was held Nov. 15, in downtown Atlanta at the Georgia Aquarium. The evening featured a special performance by Grammy and Academy Award winning songwriter, Burt Bacharach. Guests were asked not to bring gifts, but, if desired, to make a donation to the Captain Planet Foundation which funds the Turner family's various environmental charities...

Gissia Nunez, wife of reliever **Vladimir Nunez**, was able to finally make her trip to Cuba in late September, after postponing earlier due to hurricanes. Though Vladimir was unable to make the trip, Gissia met members of his family for the first time. "His maternal grandfather, his aunts, uncles and cousins still live in Vladimir's hometown called Guanajay, about 30 miles south of Havana," said Gissia. "Even though it is a small and humble town, they have most essential things but no luxuries. Everyone I met was grateful, gracious and with the most welcoming attitude I have ever experienced." T-shirts and caps provided by the Braves organization were a huge hit. Vladimir and Gissia make their home in the Tampa, Fla., area. "This trip made me realize how lucky I am to be able to see my family whenever I wish," she said...

Todd Pratt, who played with the Braves in 2006, has kept his hand in the game by holding a number of baseball clinics in Douglasville and by managing a team, the Douglasville Bulls, in the Sunbelt Baseball League, which features college level players.

WILD KINGDOM

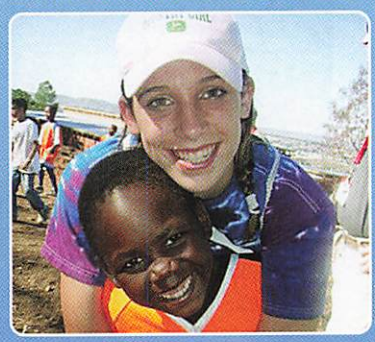


SPECIAL

CHIPPER JONES and his wife, **Sharon**, took a week off to themselves in October, right after the season ended, at the Atlantis resort in the Bahamas, where they were able to relax and even swim with the dolphins. The Jones family will spend Thanksgiving at the Double Dime Ranch in southwest Texas and Christmas at their home in Atlanta.

Chipper took a number of hunting trips this off-season to film segments for the next edition of his Buck Commander DVD series. "We're filming this season of hunts, then we'll release the DVD in late spring," said Chipper. Thus far, he's filmed hunts in Illinois, Kansas and Texas, and will film one, Dec. 15-20, at his Double Dime Ranch. His partners in the Buck Commander venture include former teammates **Adam LaRoche** and **Ryan Langerhans**, who are also filming hunts for the DVD. "The first DVD was released in June, and sales were pretty encouraging," said Chipper. "Especially since we don't advertise. It's pretty much just word of mouth."

THE SMOLTZ TOUCH



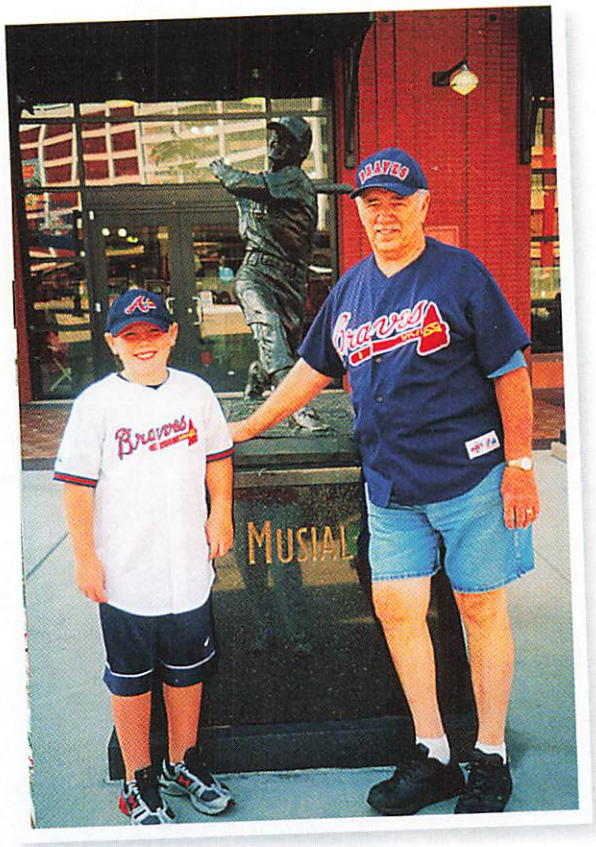
GREGAM

RACHEL SMOLTZ, 15-year-old daughter of **John Smoltz**, is following in her father's philanthropic footsteps. The high school freshman has been selected to speak about her service projects and volunteerism at an international youth conference in Taiwan the last week of November. "I was taught that you do volunteer work not for the thank you, but because it's the right thing to do," said Rachel who credited her parents' influence in her volunteerism. "Even small contributions can set off a chain reaction of service." Rachel participated in a drive to raise money to purchase dairy cows for the orphanage in Swaziland, in southern Africa, where she visited in May and met a young girl named **Tabitha** who was new to the orphanage. The two struck up a friendship, and Rachel has become Tabitha's sponsor. "I learned more from her than anything I could have taught her," Rachel said. She will travel to Taiwan with her classmate, **Spencer Maxwell**, and **Maggie Taylor**, another Atlanta area student, and with **Janine Maxwell**, author of "It's Not Okay with Me," a book about Africa, and vice president of Heart for Africa. "As someone who feels there is no higher calling than serving others, I couldn't be more proud of Rachel, Spencer, and Maggie," said Rachel's dad. "To have these students be willing to serve here locally is wonderful. To have them go and serve in Africa is outstanding, and then to go to Taiwan to speak to 3,000 other students about serving is mind-blowing."

TALKIN' CHOP

LETTERS & PHOTOS FROM OUR READERS

WHETHER YOU'RE HAVING FUN AT TURNER FIELD, EXPERIENCING A CLOSE ENCOUNTER WITH YOUR FAVORITE BRAVES PLAYER, OR JUST SHOWING OFF YOUR COLLECTION OF BRAVES STUFF OR TRYING ON YOUR NEW BRAVES SHIRT, WE WANT TO HEAR ABOUT IT AND SEE A PICTURE.



BUFFET BONUS

OMG! I actually talked to Chipper Jones from Las Vegas. At first, I was so disappointed to hear that I was going to miss Chipper because my husband and I happened to be going on vacation the exact day he was in town. But to my surprise, my best friend, Mary Temples, volunteered to get Chipper's autograph for me. She stood in line for an hour and a half just for me. (You have to understand, she is the most non-baseball fan I know.) When she was next in line, she called me and asked Chipper to keep talking so I could hear his voice. To our disbelief, Chipper grabbed her phone and started talking to me. Lord have mercy... I thought I was going to pass out at the Circus Circus buffet! Chipper is humble, sincere and appreciative of his fans. Up and coming athletes should look at Chipper and follow in his footsteps. That's what a true professional athlete should be like. So, thanks Chipper. You're the best.

WENDY CANNON
Auburn, Ala.

MISSING SKIP

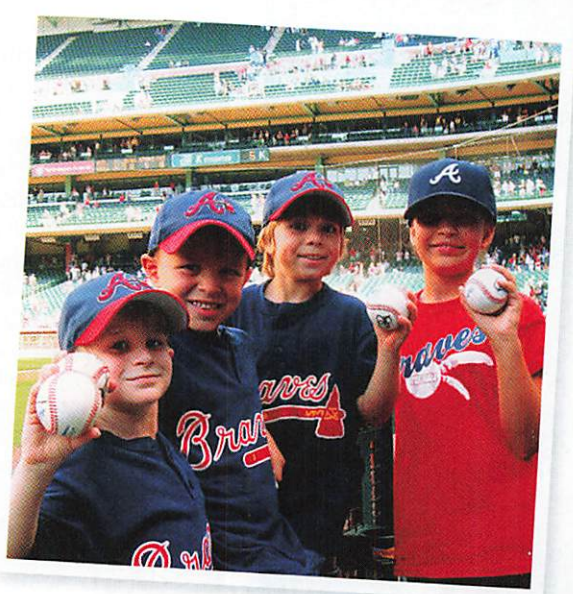
My husband (Sonny Long) and I, and our grandson Timmy Bennett, traveled to St. Louis Aug. 22 to celebrate my husband's 72nd birthday by rooting for our beloved Braves. We were rewarded with a win over the Cardinals on Aug. 23. I also want to thank ChopTalk for the September commemorative issue honoring Skip Caray. He provided us with many precious memories, and his bobblehead doll sits in our home and always makes me smile when I look at it.

SUE LONG
Benton, Ark.

TEXAS-SIZED FUN

My son's 6-year-old coach-pitch team went to the last game of the year when the Braves played the Astros in Houston. They were all very excited and wore their Braves uniforms. We sat on the Braves' side of the field, with the hope of getting some autographs. They got a lot more than that! All the boys got autographs and talked to Eddie Perez, Roger McDowell, Mike Gonzalez and Buddy Carlyle. Buddy even gave my son his cap at the end of the game. The boys were ecstatic and talked about the Braves the whole way home. I'm sure they'll never forget the great time they had.

DOUG BECKER
Houston, Tex.



CHOPTALK AND THE ATLANTA BRAVES SUPPORT OUR TROOPS

RICHMOND TRIBUTE

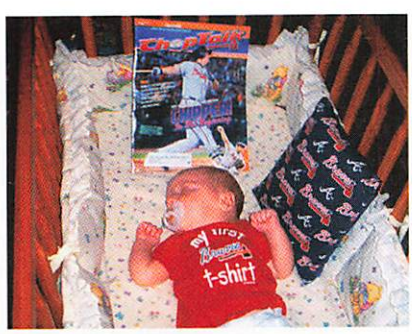
We really love the Braves so much that we asked our league if we could be the "Richmond Braves" to honor their last season. The league said okay. As a bonus, we won the championship! Go, Braves!

JULIE LANCASTER
Somerset Hills, N.J.

STARTING EARLY

I have been a diehard Braves fan for years. My 10-year-old great grandson, Noah Parker, and I come to Braves games every year. This is 2-month-old Connor Gage Hawkins, my latest great grandson. As you can see, he's already a Braves fan, too!

KNOXIE CROCKER
Guyton, Ga.



SHARE YOUR BRAVES FEVER!

WRITE TO US

Talkin' Chop c/o ChopTalk
P.O. Box 80750
Conyers, Ga. 30013-8750

Letters@ChopTalkonline.com

Letters and photos chosen for publication are subject to editing, and photos cannot be returned. Computer printouts of photos cannot be published. High-resolution files preferred. ChopTalk reserves the right to use letters and photos for promotional and advertising purposes.

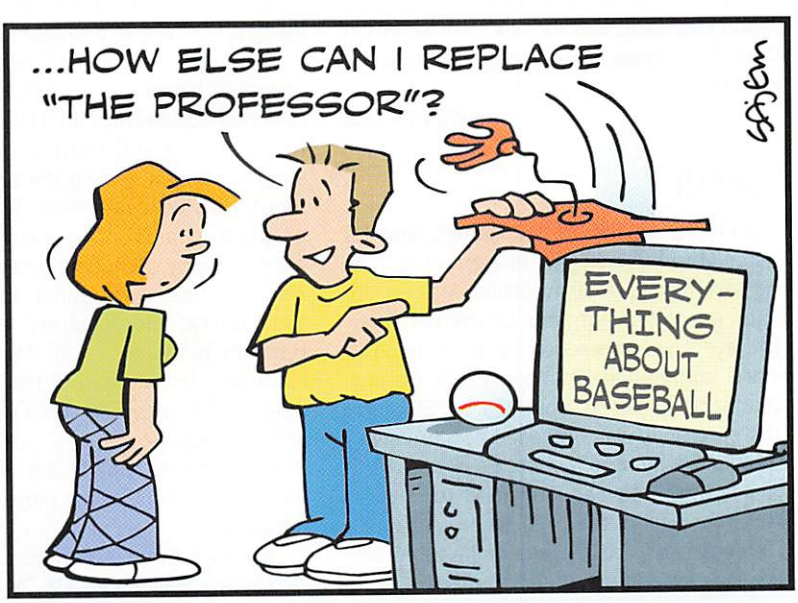
WRITE THE BRAVES

Atlanta Braves
P.O. Box 4064
Atlanta, Ga. 30302

For the Braves players, Bobby Cox, the coaches, broadcasters, or members of the front office.

If you request a response, be sure to include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Never send anything of value that you want returned. This is no guarantee of a reply.

CLOSING THE BOOK



COX, NIXON REUNITE AT SHOW

BARELY A MONTH after undergoing surgery on both his artificial knees (see page 17), Bobby Cox, with barely a hitch in his stride, made a public appearance Nov. 14 at the B.P. Sports Autograph & Collectibles Show at the Cobb Civic Center.

One of the first people to greet Cox when he arrived was Otis Nixon, a member of the 1991 "Worst to First" Braves, and the Braves' regular centerfielder in 1992-93 who made "The Catch" in '92. Nixon already was in the process of signing, but he and Cox exchanged a brief greeting before they both got to the business at hand.

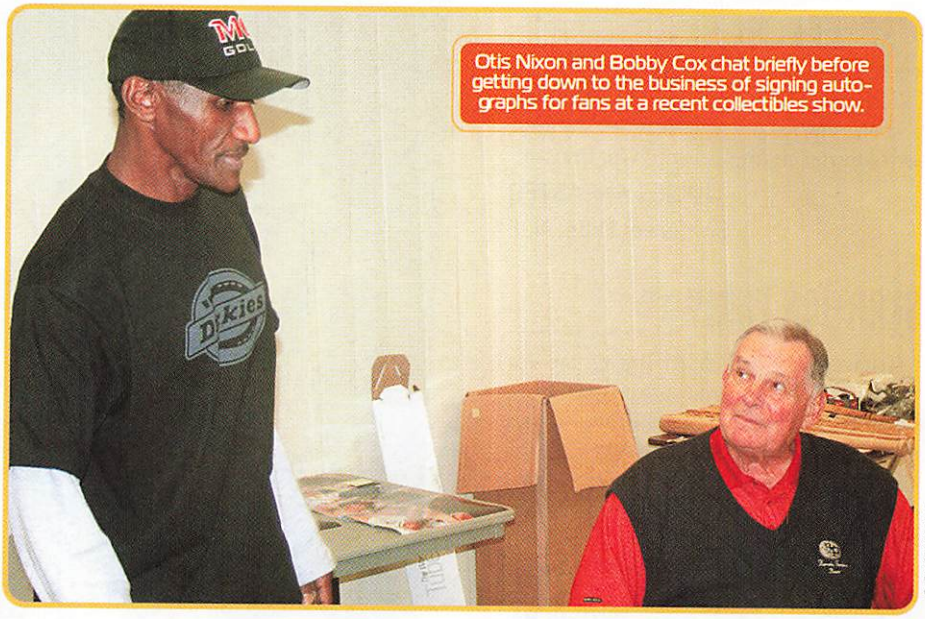
About 50 people were waiting in line for Cox, and several broke into applause when they saw him. Some fans started lining up a half hour before the manager's appearance. Many people waiting for Cox's autograph simply wanted to say hello, take home a memento and maybe snapshot. A few fans came with casual questions about the team, and Cox was always ready with a kind response.

Cox is on the advisory board of the Cindy Donald Dreams of Recovery Foundation, a group that raises money for research into spinal cord paralysis, and he agreed to donate his signing fee to the organization.

Cox's tenure of 19 consecutive seasons (1990-2008) as Braves manager is second in pro sports among active managers and head coaches to Jerry Sloan's 21-year run with the Utah Jazz of the NBA. Cox also managed the Braves from 1978-81.

Kelly Johnson, top Braves prospect Jason Heyward, and former first baseman Chris Chambliss also appeared later in the weekend.

- JON ROSS



Otis Nixon and Bobby Cox chat briefly before getting down to the business of signing autographs for fans at a recent collectibles show.

CARLOS RESTREPO

SHOVELING

Hank Aaron, his brother James, and his sister Alfredia, took part in a groundbreaking ceremony Oct. 30 in Mobile, Ala., for the Hank Aaron Museum and Learning Center. The event was preceded by a luncheon to mark completion of moving the Aarons' childhood home to Hank Aaron Stadium. The ceremony was preceded by a luncheon sponsored by the Mobile BayBears. The facility is tentatively scheduled to open in March as part of the celebration of Aaron's 75th birthday (Feb. 5). See hankaaronstadium.com for additional information.

WORDS TO REMEMBER

When players such as former Braves Phil Niekro, Gaylord Perry and Red Schoendienst are inducted into the National Baseball Hall of Fame at Cooperstown, they give memorable and often emotional speeches to the crowd. Their words, perhaps the most meaningful of their baseball lives, seldom survive that day and are quickly forgotten - even by the players themselves.

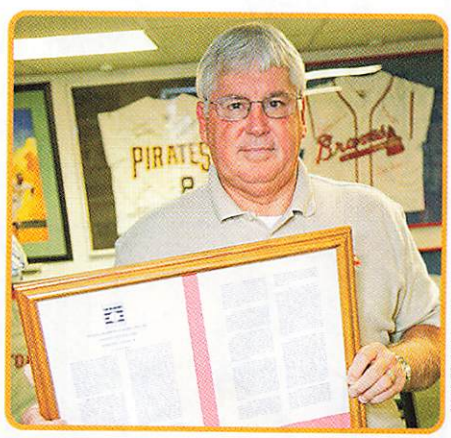
Now thanks to Braves super collector Terry Davis, profiled in the January '08 ChopTalk, these Hall of Fame speeches are being preserved as a unique collectible.

Davis was so inspired by some of the speeches he heard at Cooperstown that he obtained copies from the Hall of Fame, had them printed and framed, and this past summer began getting the players to sign them. He's collected more than 120 autographed copies of speeches given by Niekro, Perry, Schoendienst and 38 other Hall of Famers, including Johnny Bench, Yogi Berra, Bob Feller, Whitey Ford, Harmon Killebrew, Juan Marichal, Willie McCovey, Joe Morgan, Eddie Murray, Jim Palmer, Brooks Robinson, Frank Robinson and Tom Seaver.

According to Davis, the items are so unique that many of the players asked him for a copy.

"It was a great experience," said Davis, who lives in Harrisburg, Pa. "My mission was to get something different for the many different charities that I am involved with. I have donated hundreds of Hall of Fame autographed baseballs to so many different groups that I wanted to try something new and different. Little did I know when I started that not one of the players had ever been asked to sign one. In fact, most had never seen it in print, other than when they read it."

Davis gives the framed and signed speeches and other items to charities for their auctions. He takes nothing in return and estimates his contributions generate an average of $20,000 per year.



FRANK E. KING PHOTOGRAPHY

Terry Davis displays a copy of Phil Niekro's Hall of Fame induction speech like those he's turned into a unique collectible.

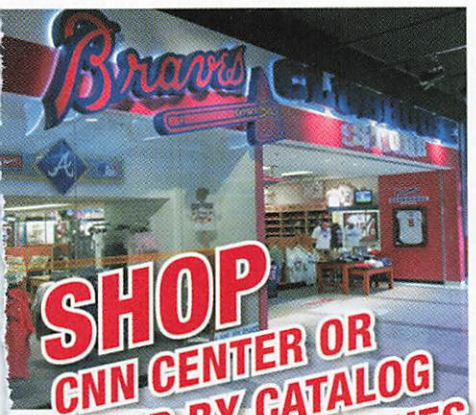
VISIT TODAY!

Visit the Braves Museum at AISLE 134 and view more than 600 Braves artifacts and photographs. See items from the team's beginning in Boston in 1871 to present day Atlanta, including the 14 Straight Exhibit.

TOUR TURNER FIELD 404-614-2311

Take a one-hour Turner Field guided tour, offered daily, to many places off limits during games. Group and school tours are offered year-round, including specialized tours on the subjects of math, social studies, art and careers in sports. Call 404-614-2311.

Ask About Our Special Promotions!

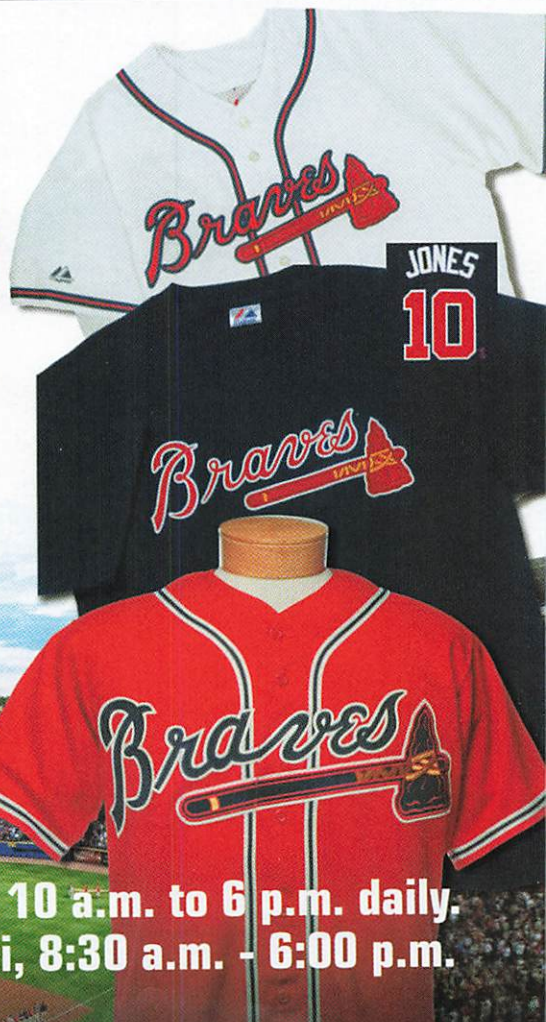


SHOP CNN CENTER OR SHOP BY CATALOG 1-800-433-BRAVES

Braves™ CLUBHOUSE COLLECTION

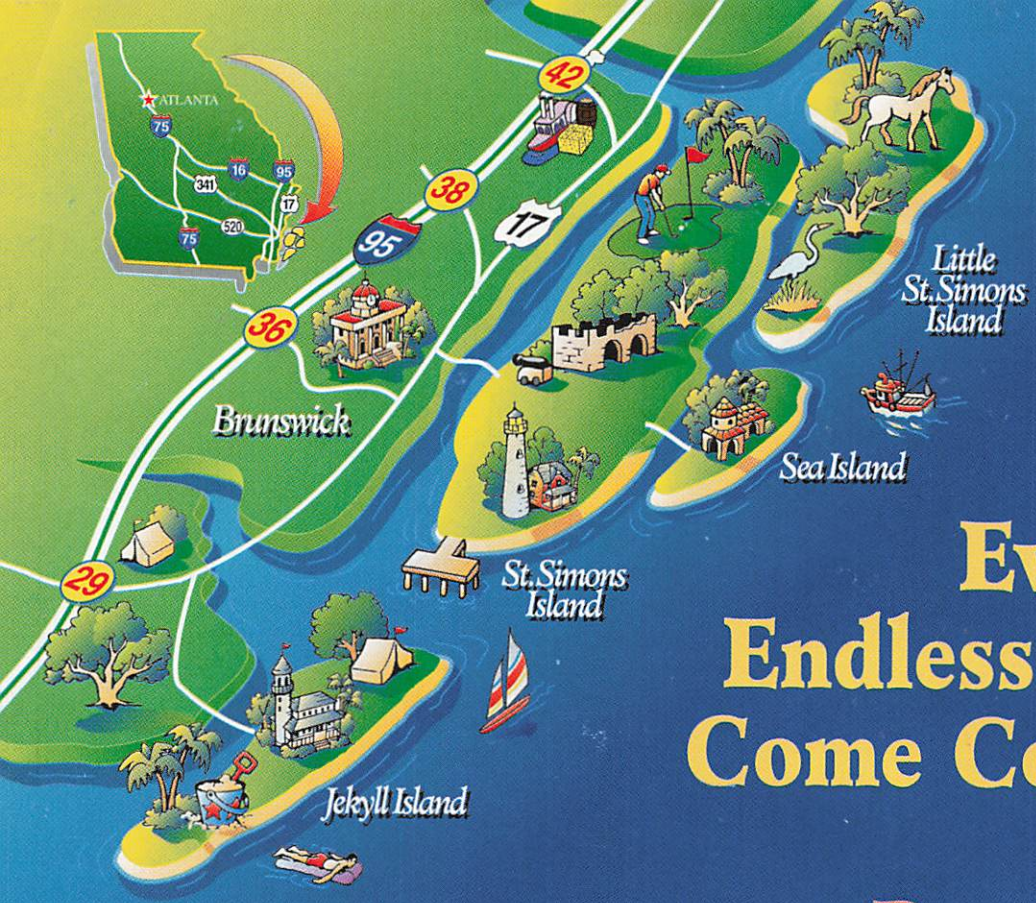
We've Outfitted The Braves, We Can Do The Same For You

T-Shirts, Caps, Jerseys, Jackets, Ladies Apparel, Youth Apparel, Novelties, Collectible and Game-Used Merchandise.



GWINNETT BRAVES APPAREL NOW AVAILABLE!

Visit The Braves Clubhouse Store at CNN Center, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.
To ORDER TODAY call 1-800-433-BRAVES Mon- Fri, 8:30 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.



Every Season, Endless Reasons To Come Coast Awhile, Atlanta!

Brunswick & The Golden Isles of Georgia. Unhurried. Unspoiled. Unmatched for countless diversions and pleasures. Vast marshlands, winding rivers, and ribbon-smooth beaches. Centuries-old oaks draped in moss. The stunning beauty of this corner of Georgia is legendary.

History is alive here. The flags of five nations have fluttered in these salt breezes marking a diverse heritage that lingers today. An English fort, antebellum plantation ruins, Victorian homes–400 years of history. And getting better with age.

Recreation for every taste and tempo. Miles of fairways fronting 216 holes of golf, acres of tennis courts. Plus casino/cruise ship, sport fishing, boating, sailing and endless bike paths offering discoveries around every bend.

Mainland Brunswick greets with quaint charm. The architecture of Old Town, fleets of shrimp boats along its waterfront, antique shops. And so much more.

Cross the fabled Marshes of Glynn and behold The Golden Isles. St. Simons Island, Sea Island, Little St. Simons Island and Jekyll Island. Beaches so perfect for swimming, strolling, shelling, sunning. A mecca for shoppers, pure paradise for golf and tennis lovers. Historic sites by the dozens, fresh seafood by the pound. And accommodations of every description from budget to luxury to camping and rental cottages.

Where I-95 bends toward the sea, pull off and coast awhile. The hospitality, like the climate, welcomes year-round. Brunswick & The Golden Isles. Enjoy them each. Explore them all.

For a free vacation planning guide: 1-800-933-COAST (2627)

BRUNSWICK AND THE GOLDEN ISLES OF GEORGIA

ST. SIMONS ISLAND • SEA ISLAND
LITTLE ST. SIMONS ISLAND • JEKYLL ISLAND

BGICVB.COM